



PROJECT  
C.A.S.E.

# Employer Engagement

## STRATEGY GUIDE

More than 70 businesses have hired individuals with disabilities who are participants in Project CASE (Creating Access to Successful Employment). This guide describes strategies and offers resources and tips on how Project CASE staff worked with and successfully engaged employers. It provides specific steps in informing and engaging business owners, human resource (HR) managers, and others to become more aware of the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities.

### How to Conduct Outreach to Businesses

- **Get to know and leverage the employer knowledge of your workforce partners.** Having someone that is already known to the employer is a way to get your foot in the door without overwhelming the employer with requests from several different entities. Cold calls are another outreach technique, but they tend not to be as effective as using existing relationships.
- **Use your first visit to listen, more than talk to the employer.** Many employers love to give tours and talk about their job openings, qualifications for various positions, and the company's successes. Listening will help you become aware of employers' specific needs, which will allow you to think about how you can help meet their needs. Landing a job for a client is not the focus during this initial visit. It is a starting point for building a relationship.
- **Attend employer open houses and hiring events.**
- **Building the relationship may take more than one visit,** especially if you do not have a workforce partner with an existing relationship with the employer. Once the relationship is established, then consider what your request is for the employer. Is it reviewing résumés? Assisting to conduct mock interviews? Participating in a job fair? Hosting a tour?



#### 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>

## Enhancing Employers' Knowledge and Awareness About Hiring Individuals With Disabilities

When interacting with employers, it is important to offer to share information and educate them about hiring and working with individuals with disabilities based on the employers' identified needs. Considerations during this time could include the following:

- **Focus on sharing information with key individuals involved in hiring and supervising employees.** This approach will likely include more than just HR professionals because some employers involve individuals at all levels to assist with hiring.
- **Introduce the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities using credible information from research and other sources.** Refer them to other sources to get information, including the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy.
- **Methods for presenting information could include the following:**
  - **Leverage** the knowledge of vocational rehabilitation professionals. Use them to do the training.
  - **Ask** employers their preferred method of conducting the training. Do they want in-person training versus a webinar? Do they want the session recorded for later viewing? Do they want to involve all employees that are part of the hiring process? Are department-based trainings better?



- **Never assume the employer's needs regarding hiring individuals with disabilities.** Find out what they know. What are they interested in learning more about? Meet the employer where they are. Some topics could include the following:
  - Disability etiquette
  - The types of assistance that can be provided to help in the hiring process and training the employee as well as the agencies or individuals that can provide the assistance
  - Types of accommodations that are available
  - Success stories from other employers
- **Ensure that those involved in the hiring process are aware of resources** and organizations available to support employers who hire individuals with disabilities. Examples could include the following:
  - Vocational rehabilitation
  - Community rehabilitation programs
  - Groups dedicated to diversity in hiring such as the Coalition for Workforce Diversity (<https://www.coalition fwd.com/>)
  - Agencies that provide services to specific disability groups such as Helen Keller National Center or the state or local autism centers
  - Job Accommodation Network (<https://askjan.org/>)
  - Office of Disability Employment Policy (<https://www.dol.gov/odep/>)



## Ideas and Strategies for Engaging Employers

### **Sponsor employer events and trainings**

For example, Project CASE held the *High- and Low-Tech Accommodations: What Every Employer Should Know* event at the University of Louisville. Project CASE staff facilitated the provision of continuing education credits from the Society for Human Resource Management and coordinated a large Apprenticeship Conference in eastern Kentucky attended by more than 30 employers.

### **Collaborate with employers on work-based learning experiences**

Determine whether an employer has an existing internship or apprenticeship program, and discuss how you can help open up this opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Partner with employers, and facilitate employer engagement in work-based learning initiatives such as such as internships, preapprenticeships, paid work experiences, or job shadowing opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

### **Document and monitor employer engagement activities**

Documenting and monitoring your employer engagement activities allows you to measure and gauge your business outreach activities over time. Some states have specific databases in conjunction with business services teams or your agency.

### **Actively support and invest in employer activities**

Establish and strengthen relationships with employers by attending workforce partner meetings and serving as an active member on business service teams and industry-specific career center advisory teams. Attend partner events with items or materials that the business would need and information about your program. Be careful not to overwhelm employers. Working together with workforce partners many times is a better approach because employers get tired of being approached by many different agencies and organizations.

### **Partner with employers to coordinate job fairs**

The Project CASE team collaborated with community rehabilitation providers, advocacy groups, and state workforce partners to coordinate job fairs for individuals with disabilities (including reverse job fairs, where job candidates host tables to explain what they offer to potential employers). Some job fairs were not specific to individuals with disabilities.



## Industry Information Sessions and Tours

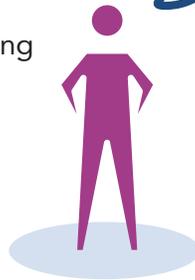
Industry information sessions and tours can be conducted with any business partner. They are great opportunities for clients to learn firsthand from businesses about what they do, what the work environment is like, and what skills and experience employers look for in employees. Clients also have a chance to ask questions in-person. Tours and information sessions could include the following:

- **In-person tours** of a facility that allow clients to see employees performing work.
- **Information sessions** that allow clients to talk with the employees responsible for hiring about hiring processes and qualifications.

- **Discussions** with current employees that allow job seekers to see a staff person's view of the company, and why they chose to work there.

### Industry tour audiences may vary.

There are two primary audiences for an industry tour. One audience includes **individuals with disabilities and their families** who are interested in learning more about working at a specific company or perhaps exploring different career pathways and industry sectors. The



other audience includes **vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors**. It is important for VR staff to participate in tours so that they can provide more informed guidance and counseling to their consumers.

### Steps in Organizing and Setting Up an Industry Tour or Information Session

#### 1 Work with employers to plan the tour or information session.

- **Determine the individual(s) at the company who are best to assist with setting up the tour.**
- **The employer should take the lead in organizing the event and how it should look.** Be aware that some companies have to conduct tours in certain ways or have established protocols. Tours may be combined with participants learning about the employer's hiring practices, skills, and education required for certain positions or the essential functions of the job.



- **Work with the employer to determine how you can help.** Most likely, your role will be getting individuals to participate. Find out if any specific attire needs to be worn during the tour that the employer will not provide, such as closed-toe shoes.
- **Have a deadline for letting the company know how many people will attend the tour.** Check in with them on a regular basis, especially if the number of participants will be limited.

## Industry Information Sessions and Tours

### 2 Prepare tour participants.

- **Advertise the event as early as possible.** Many people will need time to make arrangements to attend. If VR staff are invited, be aware that their schedules are usually booked far in advance. Share with other service providers if space allows. Follow up with those you would like to attend so that they do not forget about it. Advertising may take place through flyers or e-mail. Be sure to include all necessary information, including the address and how to register.
- **Post the industry tour/information session on social media through a career center or other organization.** Be sure to take pictures during the tour so you can share highlights from the tour on social media. Be sure to follow your agency's guide-lines for obtaining permission to photograph consumers and share pictures on social media. Don't forget to tag the employer.
- **Create a contact list of tour participants;** send a reminder and an email at least 4 days before the tour to confirm participation.
- **Prepare participants prior to the event.** If possible, provide an agenda. You might provide prompts for questions that could be asked during the tour. Some employers may require that participants present identification, wear closed-toe shoes, and leave smartphones and other technology at the door. Remind them of an appropriate arrival time and what to do once they get there.



### 3 Follow up after the tour.

- **Be sure to follow up with the employer.** Process things that went well and ways to improve the tour if it is held again.
- **Also follow up with tour participants.** What did they like? What did they learn? Would they recommend any changes? Although a tour is not a hiring event, unless specifically agreed upon with the employer ahead of time, ask if there are any job seekers who might be interested in taking the next step with the employer.





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