



Using a Career Pathways Approach to Provide Pre-Employment Transition Services

STRATEGY GUIDE

Project CASE (Creating Access to Successful Employment) has developed innovative ideas for providing Pre-Employment Transition Services (pre-ETS) to high school students with disabilities in the Eastern Kentucky region using the career pathways model. This guide demonstrates out-of-the-classroom, collaborative approaches that vocational rehabilitation (VR) professionals can use to help students explore and access different work and post-secondary opportunities and gain job-readiness skills. First, the guide describes various pre-ETS activities that Project CASE conducted. Then, it offers strategies for engaging education, business, industry, and community partners.

Infusing Five Required Elements Into Career Pathways Events

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), mandates VR agencies provide all students with disabilities opportunities to engage in meaningful services that help them explore career options, and the skills and training they will need on the path to achieving their goals. Project CASE demonstrated that the Career Pathways approach is an excellent way for state VR programs to provide high-quality pre-ETS events that target high school students

with disabilities and address each of the 5 elements WIOA requires:



- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences



- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in post-secondary education



- Workplace readiness
- Instruction in self-advocacy

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>

Infusing Five Required Elements Into Career Pathways Events con't.

Project CASE's science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) events help students engage in hands-on learning to explore career pathways within selected industries, such as health care, information technology (IT), and advanced manufacturing. Events were held on-site at a college or with an employer, in order to provide a work-based learning experience and a closer look at post-secondary options. Career exploration, learning about opportunities for post-secondary education, work-based learning and self-advocacy instructional elements were an important focus of each event. Project CASE career pathways coordinators took the lead in organizing these events and worked with VR counselors, local community technical colleges, high schools, industry professionals, and employers to ensure all 5 pre-ETS elements were addressed at each event.

Examples of Project CASE's events for high school students with disabilities include STEM camps, VR Training Center Career Pathway events, and business and industry tours, including University of Kentucky medical center "Scrubs Camps." The following section briefly describes the purpose of each activity and how the activities can be helpful to prospective and participating students.

Post-Secondary Opportunities / Community Tech College STEM Camp

STEM camps provide participating students opportunities to tour community technical colleges to learn about their programs. These tours are different from traditional campus tours because they include hands-on activities, a chance to meaningfully interact with the instructors by asking questions about career opportunities, an opportunity to learn about supports to students with disabilities, and an emphasis on self-advocacy issues relevant to young adults. In order to impact the multiple systems that students must navigate, career pathway coordinators also ensure that participants in STEM events include a range of the following partners: VR staff, special education teachers, college administrative and admission staff, college instructors, employers, and college student disability coordinators.

Vocational Rehabilitation Training Center Career Pathway Events

STEM events included work-based learning events at the Carl D. Perkins VR Training Center, which are conducted by center staff instructors. Project CASE called these events "transition parties," where the main purpose was to familiarize prospective students with career exploration, post-secondary training, and work-

based learning opportunities offered at these centers. They also highlight the career opportunities and greater earning potential that the center's training programs could create for students. These events always incorporated hands-on learning activities to engage students and familiarize them with the center staff, classrooms, career programs, and training equipment and materials.

Example STEM Events

▶ **A day of hands-on learning about nursing/healthcare positions** where, among other activities, students can dress in scrubs and learn about and practice giving an injection to a mannequin patient.



▶ **A day where students interact with robotics or drones.**



Both examples include interacting with industry professionals and opportunities to get firsthand experience in exploring a career pathway.

Business and Industry Work-Based Learning Tours

Industry tours can be conducted for and with any participating industry sector partner. For example, Project CASE conducted "Scrub Camps," which provided a day spent at a hospital learning about the many career pathways available within the healthcare sector. There also were industry tours done in collaboration with employees from partnering businesses. Industry tours give students the opportunity to hear from employees about work they do every day and the training and education needed for their jobs. They are also great opportunities for students to learn firsthand from business or organization leaders about what the business does, the job readiness skills they look for in employees, and the chance to interact and ask questions in person. Please see the Employer Engagement Strategy Guide for more detail on what these tours can provide and how best to set up an industry tour for both adult- and high school-age participants.

Steps for Organizing STEM Events/Camps

- 1 **Determine** who will be responsible for coordinating the event, and **list** partners who will collaborate: education partners, workforce partners, employer(s), industry professionals.
- 2 **Identify** the interests and needs of the students and **determine** the size of the event (e.g., STEM event size may be smaller for students with visual impairments to help ensure proper accommodation).
- 3 **Engage and communicate** with the instructors (professors or instructors at the community college or industry professionals) and **work** with them to plan an inclusive, accessible, hands-on curriculum targeted toward the age group.
- 4 **Inform** high schools through contact with high school counselors, special education teachers and administrators, educational cooperatives, pre-ETS specialists, and state transition administrators.
- 5 **Determine** the cost, if any, per student. If pre-ETS funding is used, **ensure** that all event activities align with allowable services and funding guidelines.
- 6 **Work** with the school district(s) to arrange and ensure students have transportation to the event or camp site.
- 7 **Develop** registration paperwork, including permission slips, and sign up students.

Engaging Key Partners to Ensure Success

Engaging key partners is crucial to implementing meaningful and effective pre-ETS career pathways activities. This collaboration includes understanding common goals that partners share for preparing students with disabilities for entering the workforce. The following section of this guide outlines important points and tips for engaging with secondary and post-secondary education partners, and those from workforce, business, and industry. The tips focus on ensuring that partners understand their roles, and include strategies to engage them. These key points come directly from the experiences and expertise of Project CASE staff.

Vocational Training Partners

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Engaging Key Partners to Ensure Success

High Schools

The roles and responsibilities of a high school partner in putting on a STEM event can include identifying and recruiting students, providing transportation to events, encouraging staff to attend events, and considering event logistics such as lunch.

Engagement strategies for engaging and working with high schools include:

- ▶ **Make a connection with key high school partners:** Identify individuals within your local secondary education system who can make programming and resource decisions for students with disabilities.
- ▶ **Describe your purpose:** In order to increase participation and buy-in, find common mission/goals. Point out that planning and participating in work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities might offer on-the-job professional development for their teachers/counselors, because it would deepen their knowledge about the local college or employer. Or suggest they consider
- ▶ how the purpose of Career Pathways approach could mesh well with their transition requirements for serving students, such as state reporting on future education and job attainment measures.
- ▶ **Maintain relationships** beyond one event. Keep communication active by informing your partners of activities via e-mail, telephone calls, and in-person visits. After each event, “feedback dialogue” is important. Ask “How well did the event serve your students?” and “What can we do in the future to improve or expand the experience and service?”

Tip:

Use current and/or previous event flyers and show pictures or videos from previous events when approaching a new potential partner to help their understanding of what takes place at an event.



Engaging Key Partners to Ensure Success

Community and Technical Colleges

The roles and responsibilities of a community and technical college partner can include hosting STEM events and “showing” their different programs through hands-on activities (e.g., robotics, nursing, IT). College administrators can also encourage students with disabilities to consider a variety of educational opportunities after high school, and describe for them the registration procedures, support services at the campus, and employment opportunities typically available to students after graduating from a program.

Engagement strategies for working with community and technical colleges include:

- ▶ **See partners in person:** Although communicating by e-mail or telephone can be effective, in-person contact will foster stronger relationships.
- ▶ **Be proactive in communication:** Reaching out and anticipating the needs of your partner(s) can help facilitate the growth of your relationship with them.
- ▶ **Show partners the benefits:** It is a win-win relationship with community and technical colleges because they can benefit from deepening their partnerships with their community’s high schools and enhancing staff/instructor ability to serve students with disabilities.

Tip:

Special education teachers often act as advocates for students with disabilities. They can be effective partners in establishing a relationship with a school when first reaching out, recruiting students for events, and making sure that students show up at events.



Engaging Key Partners to Ensure Success

Industry/Business Partners

The **roles** of business and industry partners typically include speaking to students at STEM events and schools about training and skill requirements of successful job applicants. Many **engagement strategies** for reaching out and working with industry and business partners are in the ***Employer Engagement Strategy Guide***. Here are a few tips for engagement:

- **Do your homework:** Collaborate with other workforce partners, including *Business Services Teams*, to identify appropriate businesses and points of contact before going into a workplace

to speak with someone. Research the business’s website to learn as much as possible about what its workforce needs might be.

- **Identify their needs and requirements:** Ask them about business needs for employees and the requirements for employment, such as credentials or type of education. You also should ask if representatives from the company could talk to students about the business needs and expectations for their employees.
- **Show up prepared:** Arrive at partnered events with items/materials that the business representatives would need to lessen the burden of participation for them.

Business Services Teams

are cross-agency, cross-programmatic groups, comprised of representatives of each of the core partner agencies, economic development, and other partners as appropriate. These teams are designed to ensure a comprehensive array of services to maximize the efficiency and expertise of system partners.

Workforce Partners

The role of workforce partners typically includes assisting with identifying employer partners who have a commitment to community engagement. Workforce partners can also provide instruction on job readiness skills such as motivation, problem-solving, teamwork, etc. They can introduce labor market concepts and provide job-seeking assistance available through the local Career Centers.

Engagement strategies for working with local workforce partners include:

- ▶ **Develop Relationships:** Regularly attend and prioritize workforce partner meetings to develop relationships with staff and better understand areas of program overlap and shared goals.
- ▶ **Work Side-by-Side:** Include workforce partners from the start in the initial event planning. They will be essential to the success of

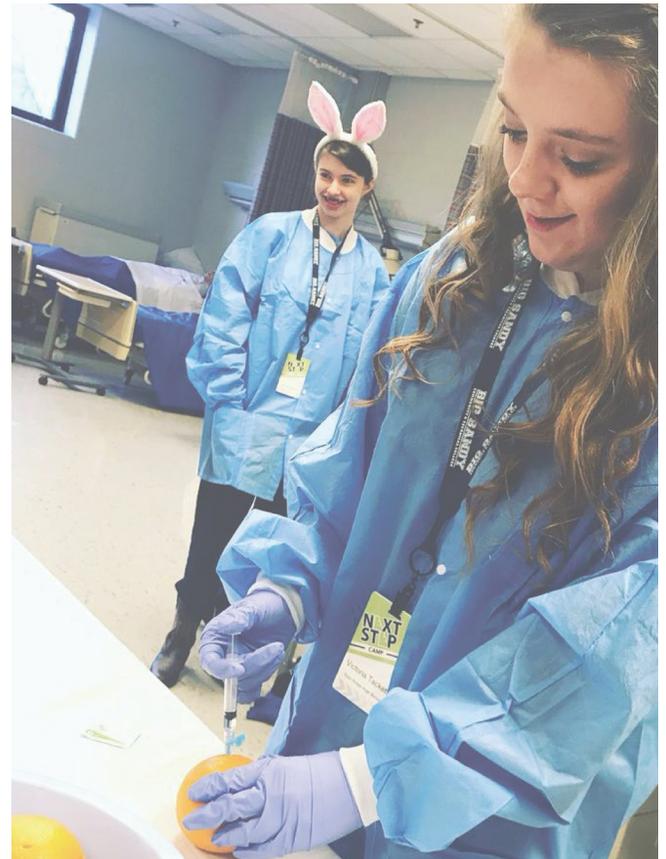
your events because they can provide valuable insight into the best way to utilize their partnership, and can help foster these workforce relationships.

- ▶ **Be Reciprocal:** Offer your expertise and resources for disability information at workforce partners’ upcoming events.

Important Elements for Planning and Success



- Collaborative partnerships
- Pre-ETS providers
- Out-of-the-classroom venue
- Secondary counselors and teachers who attend, learn, and help students engage
- Transportation
- State VR transition administrators to ensure compliance with implementation requirements





To find out more about Project CASE, contact:

Helga Gilbert, *Project Director*

Helga.gilbert@ky.gov • 8412 Westport Road • Louisville KY, 40242



Established in 1946, American Institutes for Research (AIR) is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research on important social issues and delivers technical assistance, both domestically and internationally, in the areas of education, health, and workforce productivity. AIR conducts independent evaluation of Project CASE and translated evaluation findings to develop this strategy guide.

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