



CONNECTICUT – Diverse Ability Career Fairs

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

The Strategy: The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grantee in Connecticut in partnership with the vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency hosted a number of highly accessible and inclusive career fairs called Diverse Ability Fairs. In doing so, these events provide information, resources and services for businesses as well as job seekers with disabilities. The Diverse Ability fair is designed in part to address employer concerns to hire individuals with disabilities. Beyond partnering with VR, additional partners include the local mental health and addiction agency, community service providers, local community college representation, and Connecticut's Business Leadership Network (BLN). These collaborations also serve to "build out" their network connection to employers and job seekers.

The Plan: With a variety of partners and service providers involved, it is important to establish an approach that will engage the development of the Diverse Ability Career Fair. Connecticut's DEI approach includes three key stages:

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

- Identify partners and establish roles and tasks for each representative.
- Identify venue that incorporates transportation and accessibility components.
- Conduct employer outreach through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regional business representatives, Connecticut's BLN – utilize all available employer networks.
- Include Disability Resource Coordinators for linkage to partners and staff coordination.
- Market through social media – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram – as well as television and radio announcements or other marketing venues (utilize in-house state level marketing to the extent possible).
- Send reminders to employer representatives with planning information and logistics!
- Establish an employer fee to participate as is standard practice for job fairs.

Stage II – Diverse Ability Fair (Day of Fair):

- Provide morning presentations to employers with resources of interest such as assistive technology presentations, business-to-business inspirational speakers, resource materials on accessibility, and information on Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Acts.
- Provide on-site, pre-career fair services for job seekers such as resume reviews and practice interviews.
- Incorporate Assistive Technology Center for employer information as well as opportunity to print revised resumes for job seekers.
- Provide business and job seeker surveys to obtain feedback.

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

- Review survey data and consider future adjustments.
- Follow-up with employers and partnering agencies on potential interviews and hires.

System/Workforce/WIOA Outcomes: Connecticut DEI achieved significant success with participation across several Diverse Ability Career Fairs that included 250 to 500 job seekers and a range of 20 to 50 employers participating depending upon the venue. Beyond the actual events, there was online success with approximately 125,000 views across social media to increase awareness. From a systems perspective, it was found that the Diverse Ability Career Fair approach strengthened partnerships especially between WIOA Title I and IV services by jointly focusing on the needs of the customer. This joint partnership sets an example on the innovative provision of supports allowed by participating agencies or programs to meet individual job candidate's needs that supports the WIOA one-stop vision. 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; Build Cross Agency Partnerships (WIOA adult and youth, vocational rehabilitation, developmental and mental health agencies, etc.); and Identify Funding Needs and Sources (agencies involved share Diverse Ability Career Fair costs).

Additional Resources on this Topic:

- [Connecticut DEI Best Practice -- Diverse Ability Career Fairs](#) – Webinar archive presentation on Connecticut DEI comprehensive approach to engage businesses that has resulted in successful outcomes for job seekers 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.
- The [US Business Leadership Network](#) unites business around disability inclusion in the workplace, supply chain and marketplace with nearly 50 local affiliates nationwide.