

Ideas to Increase Employers at Community Conversations on Employment

Many districts in Wisconsin have been hosting Community Conversations aimed at developing local solutions to increase employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. They have experienced varying degrees of employer attendance at their events. Below are strategies schools have used to boost the number of employers at these events.

- ⦿ **Check the calendar.** Before setting the date and time for your event, be sure to call the Chamber or local business association to determine if there are conflicting events. The Chamber staff person might also be able to give you some advice on the time of day to hold your event that would work best for employers in the area.
- ⦿ **Involve students with invitation distribution.** Take a few students out with you to stop into businesses and personally invite employers to your event. This helps students develop their social skills as well as show employers that students with disabilities are ready and able to work.
- ⦿ **Send out a press release.** Work with your local newspaper to publicize the event. Share it in your school newsletter and any other media outlets that you have in your community.
 - Ask for air time from a local radio or news station. Have students present the concept of employment for all. You can even pair students up with local employers that you already work with!
- ⦿ **Ask employers to invite other employers.** Your school already has relationships with employers. Ask your current employers to talk about your event at their networking functions and personally invite other employers in your community.
- ⦿ **Create a list of everyone you know.** Take the time to brainstorm a list of all the people the planning committee knows and the places they go in their community. Committee members should extend personal invitations to the people on their list.
- ⦿ **Invite families and alumni.** Parents and alumni may be business owners or managers. Be sure to send the invitation out to families and alumni in the district through school envelopes, emails and newsletters.
- ⦿ **Call employers a day or two before the event.** Employers are busy. They might have gotten the invitation a few weeks before the event, intended to attend, but then forget about the event. A friendly reminder call could be the answer to get them there!



- ⊙ **Enlist the help of people who are well connected.** Every school or community has a person who seems to know everyone in town. Perhaps it's the school secretary, the football coach or a real estate agent. Ask this person to extend personal invitations to the people they know.
 - Attend staff meetings of schools in your district (as well as your own). Showcase the work their former students are doing with a short presentation from students or use a PowerPoint with lots of pictures. Be sure the purpose for the Community Conversation is clear.
 - Give each person two invites and ask them to personally invite an employer or business manager in charge of hiring. Better yet, have them offer to attend WITH them!
- ⊙ **Contact your county's Job Center Manager.** The Job Center is connected to employers in your community. They may be willing to send the invitation out or make copies available for employers at upcoming business events or job fairs.
- ⊙ **Partner with your district's Career and Technical Education staff to broaden your reach.**
- ⊙ **For employers that say they can't attend, ask them for a 15 minute breakfast meeting.** Bring breakfast, a presentation from youth, and an offer to help them fill open spots!



One of the most effective things you can do to get employers to your Community Conversation is to **call them a day or two before the event to remind them!**