

Effective Job Development Strategies

Special Educators and Transition Coordinators play a vital role in connecting students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to employers for career exploration, work experiences, and permanent jobs. The concept of 'job development' can seem daunting. Here are some effective strategies and resources you can use with students to make the most of your time and effort.

Reflect on your own employment journey.

What led you to your first job opportunities? Most likely you pursued experiences based on your interests and who you (or your family) knew. You took on new responsibilities, took some risks, and tried new things. Through these experiences you gathered information to make choices about your future. In other words, you developed your self-determination skills. Similarly, students with disabilities develop their path to employment through exposure and a wide-variety of experiences in their communities. As you create plans with your students each year, keep this in mind.

Invite & involve parents.

Employment exploration and skill development doesn't just happen at school - youth acquire skills at home and through activities on the evenings and weekends. Families are often instrumental in helping youth find their first job opportunities. After all, family members are community members who are connected to employers!

You can foster positive, collaborative relationships with families by:

- ⦿ inviting their participation,
- ⦿ encouraging them to have high expectations, and
- ⦿ helping them understand how they contribute to the employment planning process.

For more information
and resources visit the
[Let's Get to Work](#)

The National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD for Youth) has created [Guideposts for Success: A Framework for Families Preparing Youth for Adulthood](#) and many other resources to help you understand how to cultivate productive partnerships with families. A [series of webcasts](#) for parents and educators is also available on the Let's Get to Work website.

Engage in meaningful planning with students so you connect with the right employers.

Before you start contacting employers, engage students and their families in planning. What are the student's primary interests? What are their transferrable skills? What conditions need to be present at the workplace for success? Answering these will help you generate a list of the **right** employers to contact. In addition to your school's transition planning tools, you can use:

- ⦿ The [Self-Directed Transition Planning Tool](#) can help students and their planning teams think about employment goals.
- ⦿ The inControl Wisconsin [Self-Directed Employment Planning Modules](#) are a free learning and planning series for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).
- ⦿ The [Discovery Process](#) is used to identify a student's transferrable skills, ideal conditions, and workplace contributions to successfully negotiate a job with an employer. Information and webinars on Discovery can be found on the Montana Rural Institute's Transition and Employment website or at www.WorkSupport.com.

Carve out time to network with employers effectively.

Most jobs are found in the hidden job market. This means that most job opportunities are never advertised. To find them, you must network!

- ⦿ Connect with employers based on an individual student's desire to learn about their workplace and pursue work in their industry.
 - Don't ask for a job when you make the first contact! Ask the employer to provide a tour of the business, an informational interview, or a job shadow. Most employers are open to such opportunities. This gives the employer a chance to meet the student without the pressure of having to offer a job.
 - Make sure you and the student arrive prepared to ask questions and share information about the student's interests, skills and abilities.
 - During the visit, listen for unmet needs the employer might have.
 - After, follow up with a thank you note and consider how you could make contact with that employer again.
- ⦿ Engage in relationship mapping with students and families to find out who they are connected to. Enlist the student and family's help in making contact with these people.
- ⦿ Connections to employers already exist with your school through DECA and school-to-work programs. Talk to the school staff involved in these programs about using these contacts for students with disabilities.
- ⦿ Involve students as much as possible in your networking efforts. Attend job fairs with them. Request to present to the local Chamber, Service Clubs or business networking groups with them. Prepare students to talk about their interests and the contributions they can make to the workplace.
- ⦿ Collaborate with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Business Services Consultants and employment service providers in your area.
- ⦿ Host a Community Conversation focused on increasing employment opportunities for youth with disabilities. Information about planning Community Conversations can be found on the Let's Get to Work website.
- ⦿ If time permits, join a service organization or business networking group.



Developing employment opportunities for students boils down to getting to know your students' employment goals and skills, getting to know the needs of employers in your community and finding the right matches between the two. There are a number of strategies and tools you can learn about and use. To be the most successful learn about them and pick the ones that work best for you, your students, and your community.