



Illinois  
Department of Commerce  
& Economic Opportunity



# Illinois Youth Career Pathway Grant Opportunity

## Technical Assistance Session: Business Engagement



Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support,  
Illinois State University, College of Education

# Access and Participation Guidelines

## Meeting Access



Select the "Call Me" option on Zoom to use your phone for audio while using the video option, if you choose.



This webinar will be recorded and posted to IWN.

## Meeting Participation

- Everyone will be muted for this webinar.
- A FAQs Page has been created to track questions raised during the webinar.
- Materials shared during the meeting will be available on workNet.

# Why Business Engagement Matters

From the NOFO:

“ Employers should have a leadership role in developing and supporting the career pathway programs that integrate work-based learning opportunities through experience. Businesses are best suited to ensure current content for programs and careers that are high demand/higher skill at the local, regional, or state level.”

# Why Business Engagement

“...Businesses must note their commitment to either interview youth who complete the training program, provide recommendations for participants, or hire participants who complete it. As WIOA emphasizes deeper investments in a system that supports employer demand-driven sector-based programs addressing youth's diverse needs, the expectation for a sustainable and successful grant applicant must increase the number of businesses committed to employing youth served.”


## WHY **ENGAGE** BUSINESS?

Employers need **training providers** for a workforce with the right skills and credentials.

**Schools** (HS and College) need employers to help them get the skills and competencies right.

Employers need **schools, training providers, and communities** to support students in learning essential skills.

Schools (HS and College) need employers to employ and continue to support graduates.



THINK  
OUTSIDE  
THE BOX

## BENEFITS OF WORK-BASED LEARNING

### **BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS**

- Employees have the information and skills needed to make informed job and long-term career choices.
- Reduced turnover - excellent retention.
- Greater productivity.
- Lower costs.





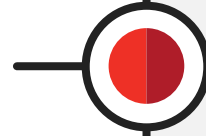
## TIPS FOR EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION:

- It's sometimes tough to get employers to participate.
- Know your WBL strategies and concepts. Be persistent.
- Identify talent pain points—**listen to the employer.**
- Use other WBL examples from business and industry.
- Tight labor market—time to “grow your own” pipeline.
- Find, identify, or create industry intermediaries to assist employers.

# WHAT COMPELS EMPLOYERS TO PARTICIPATE?

Employers need to know that training will not be a loss leader.

Employers need to know that young people will continue to be supported throughout training.



Employers need assurance that young people will be productive from the start.



# WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT?

Skilled talent

Solutions that makes sense

A diverse workforce

To understand apprenticeships

Mutually beneficial partnerships

Flexible and nimble training offerings

Support for apprentices and the company



# ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

**Engage other employers.** Other employers are your best advocates

**Leadership matters.** Bring in governors, college presidents, mayors, council commissioners

**Generate a buzz.** Media reports, good stories, op-ed pieces

**Open houses and business events.** Know what you're talking about

**Share national examples.** Be a leader

**Outreach and engage with** Chambers of Commerce and local or regional industry associations



**How do you engage a  
business?**

# Focus in...

- Common obstacles with employer engagement
- Steps for employer engagement
- “Selling” your program to employers
  - Speaking the language of business
- Q&A

# Common Obstacles

- Which companies should we start with?
- Who should we speak with?
- When should I approach them?
- How do I help them overcome their fears of working with youth?

# Steps for Engaging Businesses

1. Develop a targeted list of employers - who are the most responsive to intervention
2. Reach out to businesses - email and call (yes, the phone is still a tool to talk with people)
3. Identify the businesses' needs - you are a solution to their problem
4. Share how you can address their problem - Pitch your services
5. Follow Up and confirm what has been agreed upon
6. Build a Relationship!



# **Step 1: Create a List of Businesses**



# Know Your Targets

Before you can target employers, you should know:

- Your program model
- Target population
- What is your ask
- What is their need

Short-term career

Youth Apprenticeship

Paid work experience

Youth with disabilities

Young parents

Pre-apprenticeship



# Be Targeted in your business list...



Create a list of 5-10 companies to target by researching:

- Growing sectors and businesses in your region
- High Turn Over Industries
- Youth-friendly opportunities

# Identifying Growing Sectors

## Start with a Search:

- Formal data sources:
  - Bureau of Labor Statistics: For 10-year projections
  - Illinois Department of Employment and Security
  - Chambers of Commerce
  - LWIAs
- Informal sources:
  - LinkedIn, Indeed, Glassdoor
  - Personal and professional networks
  - Company website
  - Press releases/news



# High Turn Over Industries

Retirement booms in:

- Manufacturing
- Government
- Agriculture

Areas where turnover or advancement creates openings

# Identifying Youth-Friendly Companies

## Youth-friendly looks like:

- Accessibility
- Flexibility
- Entry-level jobs
  - Beware of education inflation
- Mentorship
- Civic-minded or corporate social responsibility plans
- Safety
- Youth-oriented industries
- Locally-owned

# Indicators of Good Partners!

CHALLENGE	DESCRIPTION	INDICATOR
SKILLS GAPS IN HIRING	Businesses need to hire and have plenty of applicants, but applicants do not have the skills required to do the job.	Job postings stay open for a long time.
DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING TALENT	Businesses have opportunities to advance current employees, but those employees lack the required skills for these positions.	Instead of promoting from within, businesses are posting job openings for mid-level positions.
ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT	Businesses are experiencing unusually high turnover and/or having difficulty finding interested applicants.	Jobs are constantly being posted and reposted.
RETIRING WORKFORCE	Businesses are experiencing high levels of retirement in skilled positions.	A business is posting multiple job openings for skilled positions that have not been open in the recent past.
ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY	Businesses have enough workers, but are struggling to keep pace with technological and industry advances.	No jobs are open, but the business has expressed an interest in customized and/or technical training.



# **Step 2: Reach out to Business**



# Contact Targeted Businesses

- Identify who in the company has knowledge of hiring and operations
  - May need to interview more than one person
- Request an interview
  - Speak to the business needs: “We’d like to speak with you about how we could support your recruitment and retention goals.”

# Step 3: The Interview



# The Interview

## Understand their needs

What entry level jobs do you have the most difficulty filling?

How easily are you able to find workers with the right skill sets?

What positions have the highest turnover?

Do you anticipate the retirement of highly skilled workers soon?

If your company has diversity goals and strategies, do you have difficulty attracting new and more diverse talent pools?

## Understand how they fit with youth.

Do you have staff available who could serve as mentors?

How common is it for this occupation to be a young person's first job?

What kind of training is used to onboard new staff?

How do you invest in your employees?

# Potential Pain Points

- Recruitment
  - Locating and attracting talent
  - Diversifying the pipeline
- Persistent Vacancies
  - Retiring workforce
  - Skills gap in the community
  - Frequent turnover
- Low employee retention rate
  - Wage chasing
  - Turnover
  - Benefit/pay structure
- High training costs



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

Source:  
[https://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship\\_toolkit.pdf](https://www.doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf)

**Step 4: Share how you can  
address their problem**

# Youth Employment $\neq$ Charity

Speak to how your youth employment program can address one or more business needs.

# Top Reasons for Businesses to Engage in Youth Employment

From a United Way Study in Northeast FL:

1. Diversity
2. Ability to tap into a future labor force
3. Unfair hiring advantages
4. Cost-effective employees
5. Temporary work opportunities/alternative work times.

***“While the majority of respondents believed that participating in youth employment initiatives was beneficial to the community, this reason alone did not serve as a significant impetus for participation.”***

Source: <https://unitedwaynefl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/18-YEP-Executive-Summary.pdf>

# Top Reasons that Businesses Do NOT Engage in Youth Employment

From a United Way Study in Northeast FL:

1. Disconnect between opportunities and youth applicants
2. Finances
3. Time
4. Transportation
5. Limitation of Public Resources

Source: <https://unitedwaynefl.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/18-YEP-Executive-Summary.pdf>

# Through the Equity Lens...

- Most employers understand the value of equity
- Many employers want to embrace equity
- Frequently, they do not have the tools or time
- WE OFFER SOLUTIONS!

# Value Proposition

- After the interview, paraphrase the needs using business language
- Share your agency's value-add that speaks to their needs





# Speaking the Language of Business

## CBO Jargon

1. Job Readiness Training (JRT)
2. Asset-based/client-centered
3. 21st Century/Employability Skills
4. Job Developer
5. Case management /wraparound services
6. WIOA/CBDG/TANF
7. Incumbent Worker
8. Justice Impacted – Returning Citizen



# Speaking the Language of Business

## Business Language

1. Trained or Ready to Work
2. Focused on connecting qualified candidates with quality employment opportunities
3. Employees who have customer service skills, are team-oriented, effective at time management, etc.
4. Staffing Specialist
5. Employee Assistance Services/Retention Services
6. Funding to offset costs

# Speaking the Language of Business

- Research terminology unique to that business/industry by visiting:
  - O\*net
  - Trade magazines
  - Company websites
  - Newspaper articles



# Step 5: Follow Up

# Follow up and confirm the agreement

- Send a summary of your meeting that outlines:
  - Identified needs
  - How your program can address those needs
  - What your agency can offer
- Summarize the benefits of working with youth



# Step 6: Build a Relationship

# Build the Relationships

- ✓ Send great candidates!
- ✓ Use business language to address any challenges
  - ✓ i.e., Instead of case management, refer to retention efforts with your young adults
- ✓ Offer ongoing technical assistance
  - ✓ i.e.: Employee/mentor training
- ✓ Create a schedule for check-ins
- ✓ Develop MOUs

# Take Aways!

- Listen First!
- Be a solution provider
- Be Flexible
- Be Creative
- BE WILING TO DO THE HEAVY LIFTING
- It's not always about the money



# References and Resources

- Aspen Institute: *A Toolkit to Engage Employers and Opportunity Youth on the Future of Work*
- Reimagine Retail Chicagoland: *Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers*
- Department of Labor: *A Targeted Approach to Apprenticeship Business Engagement*
- United Way of Northeast Florida: *Executive Summary of Youth Employment*
- Urban League: *Employer Engagement by Community-Based Organizations*

Any  
Questions