



# REIMAGINING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

A TOOLKIT FOR PROVIDERS



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## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Introduction



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Welcome



Welcome to *Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers*.

[Reimagine Retail Chicagoland](https://www.reimagineretailchicago.org/),<sup>1</sup> a collaborative workforce initiative, believes that a strong and stable frontline workforce is a competitive advantage for retail employers, and frontline retail jobs are an important entry-point to career pathways for local jobseekers.

In 2016, our collaborative of 12 Chicago organizations was selected by the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/)<sup>2</sup> and supported by the [Walmart Foundation](http://giving.walmart.com/foundation)<sup>3</sup> as one of six local initiatives to explore ways to enhance stability and improve mobility for workers in retail.

Over the past couple of years, we realized that in order to create systemic change around job retention, we need stronger engagement between workforce development practitioners and employers. Conversations with employers need to go beyond the basic question of “How can we help you fill your jobs?” This Toolkit can help you build your value to employers not only in retail, but in other industries as well.

We designed our Toolkit to provide you with practical information and tools to approach employers from a position of value and help your employer partners recruit and retain a high-quality workforce. Working collaboratively with employers can help them create better jobs, increase employee motivation and productivity, and enhance the quality of work life for employees (and their managers too).

Also, to strengthen the capacity of your organization, this guide contains useful information on the retail industry and on retail career pathways.

We recognize and appreciate your commitment to serving your employer partners and your jobseeker constituents. Together we can reimagine retail!

Cyndi Solitro, Director

Reimagine Retail Chicagoland

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reimagineretailchicago.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/>

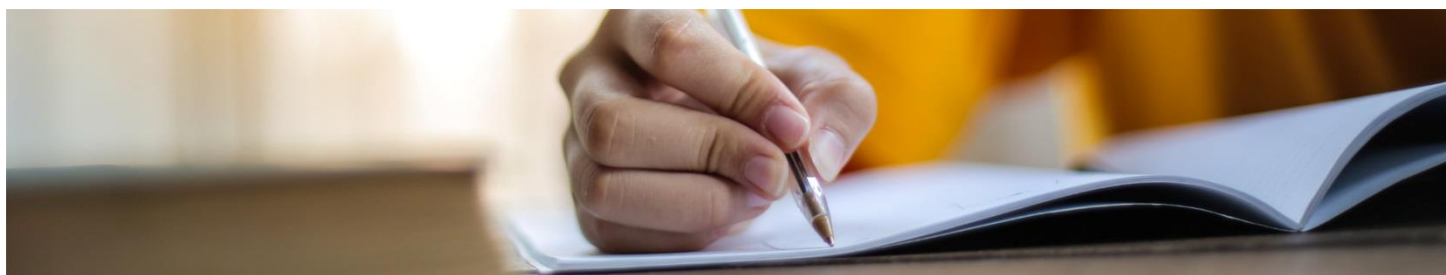
<sup>3</sup> <http://giving.walmart.com/foundation>



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Section 1

### Research & Planning





## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Research & Planning

## Where to Find Retail Employers



Developing a robust network of employer contacts is key to ensuring opportunities for your job seeker clients. But where do you start? Below we list ideas for locating employers online, in your network, and in your community.



### Online

- ☑ Company websites: look here for details on job descriptions, job openings, and employee contacts who play different roles in management and hiring.
- ☑ [LinkedIn](#):<sup>1</sup> connect with sector associations like the [National Retail Federation](#),<sup>2</sup> [Chambers of Commerce](#),<sup>3</sup> economic development groups, or small businesses and entrepreneurs. Follow CEOs of larger retailers to see what articles or innovations they are posting about their business. Search LinkedIn using retail company name, title (e.g., general manager, HR manager, etc.) and Chicago to identify people to connect to. Include a brief message when you request to connect. Make sure your own LinkedIn profile provides helpful information about your work!
- ☑ Social Media ([Facebook](#),<sup>4</sup> [Twitter](#),<sup>5</sup> and [Instagram](#)):<sup>6</sup> Follow the pages of relevant companies to stay up-to-date on relevant news, new store openings, hiring fairs, etc.
- ☑ Read the local newspaper and relevant business magazines (like [Crain's](#)<sup>7</sup> or [Chicago's Business Journal](#))<sup>8</sup> to learn about new employers moving into the area and about companies profiled for innovative new practices
- ☑ Pay attention to which email groups and listservs you belong to. Is anybody posting about their hiring needs or questions about workplace practices?



### In Your Network

- ☑ Start with your own organization! What employer contacts do you have in your database? Reach out! Ask employers who are already close to your organization to not only recommend fellow business people, but to make "warm" introductions.
- ☑ Inquire with your organization's Board of Directors. Are any of them hiring? Do they have any colleagues who are hiring? Can they introduce you to General Managers?
- ☑ If your organization receives funding from a corporate foundation in the sector, ask your grant point of contact for an introduction to their local HR team or General Managers of stores.
- ☑ Tap into alumni participants from your program who are currently working. Is their company hiring? Do they have friends whose companies are hiring?

- ☑ Collaborate with partner agencies. Do they have a job opening they can't fill? Maybe you can help!
- ☑ Ask friends, family, and neighbors to tell you about their places of employment.
- ☑ Host or attend hiring events with your job developer colleagues and introduce yourself to employers.
- ☑ Talk with acquaintances at any religious organizations you may be affiliated with (e.g., church, mosque, synagogue, etc.), as well as any social or political organizations.



## In Your Community

- ☑ Develop relationships with your local Chambers of Commerce. Workers here likely possess knowledge of local employers and their hiring needs and can suggest specific contacts (or can point you in the right direction).
- ☑ Join organizations and volunteer for committees likely to put you in closer contact with employers, people involved in economic planning and other workforce development professionals.
- ☑ Attend neighborhood council meetings to meet local employers.
- ☑ Consider the businesses where you are a customer. Do the employees like their jobs? Are they hiring?
- ☑ Attend open houses for new businesses in your area. Bring a welcome gift!
- ☑ Talk with the [Alderman](#)<sup>9</sup> in your ward to understand what new developments might be coming to the neighborhood.
- ☑ Use maps to identify employers that are easily accessible via public transportation or are in close proximity to where your job seekers live.
- ☑ Look at the list of businesses that sponsor local fundraisers. Do any of them share a like-minded social vision with your organization?
- ☑ Walk around the neighborhood and pop into businesses you think would be a good fit for your job seeker clients. When you succeed in getting a retailer engaged in conversation, ask if she has colleagues in other stores she can introduce you to.



## References

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://nrf.com/>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.chicagolandchamber.org/>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.chicagobusiness.com/>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.bizjournals.com/chicago>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/about/council.html>

## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Research & Planning

## Using Labor Market Information



Labor Market Information (LMI) is data about occupations, industries, and the labor market as a whole that helps provide a clearer picture of the employment landscape in a specific geographic area. LMI provides us with data and assessments to help our job seekers make educated decisions about job opportunities and career paths, as well as help us to engage employers and develop relevant programming. Below is a list of websites (organized alphabetically) commonly used to gather information about industries, occupations, skills, and other pertinent job information.



### Websites at a Glance

WEBSITES	Occupational Overview	Interest & Values Assessment	Applying Skills to the Labor Market	Skills Transfer	Criminal Record Resources	Job/Employer Search	Credentials and Certifications	Employment Projections & Trends
Bureau of Labor Statistics	✓							✓
Career One Stop	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership	✓							✓
Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)	✓		✓	✓				
GlassDoor						✓		
Illinois Work Net	✓					✓		
LinkedIn						✓		
My Next Move		✓		✓		✓		
O*Net	✓	✓	✓					





## Detailed Website Profiles

### Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

<https://www.bls.gov/>

The BLS is a department of the U.S. Department of Labor. This website provides data and statistics on labor economies and industry overviews. To access detailed 10-year projections for occupations in Illinois by Local Workforce Investment Areas, visit the Illinois Department of Employment Security website [here](#).<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Specific Resources to Check Out***

- Occupational Overview
  - [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)<sup>2</sup>
  - [Occupational Finder](#)<sup>3</sup>

#### ***What the Website Is Good For***

- Identifying careers with projected growth
- Formal education requirements for certain jobs and potential on the job training
- Income estimates for different careers

## Career One Stop

<https://www.careeronestop.org/>

Career One Stop is a website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. It serves as an information hub to equip job seekers and job developers with employment information.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Occupational Overview
  - [Occupational Profiles](#)<sup>4</sup>
  - Browse fast growing occupations by [education level](#)<sup>5</sup>
  - [Video Library](#)<sup>6</sup>
- Applying Skills to the Labor Market
  - [Skill Matcher](#)<sup>7</sup>
- Skills Transfer
  - [Sample career ladders/lattices](#)<sup>8</sup>
  - Designing your own competency model (an overview of fundamental competencies/skills needed to succeed across all jobs in an industry or career cluster) and career ladder can help focus research in an industry. [Create one here](#).<sup>9</sup> See how building career ladders is useful for [communicating workforce needs](#)<sup>10</sup> and [career guidance](#).<sup>11</sup>
- Criminal Record Resources
  - [CareerOneStop](#)<sup>12</sup> has a general overview of employment with a criminal record and a list of [common reentry jobs](#).<sup>13</sup>
- Job/Employer Search
  - [Job Listings](#)<sup>14</sup>
  - [Business Finder](#)<sup>15</sup>

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Browsing fast growing occupations by educational level
- Sharing videos with your clients about what work might look like in various occupations
- Formal education requirements for jobs and potential for on the job training
- Income estimates for different careers



## Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership

<http://www.workforceboard.org/>

The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (Chicago's Workforce Board) provides information on the region's current and projected labor market.

### ***Specific Resources to Check Out***

- Occupational Overview
  - [Target Occupation Profiles \(TOPs\)](#):<sup>16</sup> Target Occupational Profiles (TOPs) are one page reports that provide information about each of the 40 target occupations eligible for Individual Training Account (ITA) dollars under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). [Retail Supervisor](#)<sup>17</sup> is one of these target occupations.
- Employment Projections & Trends
  - [Where are the Jobs?](#)<sup>18</sup> Quarterly Reports: The Partnership uses the Labor Insight tool from Burning Glass Technologies to analyze hundreds of thousands of recent postings pulled from internet job boards quarterly.

### ***What the Website Is Good For***

- Understanding specific information about targeted occupations, including: current and projected number of jobs, wages, job duties, education and skills requirements, job titles, and largest employers.
- Digesting real-time labor market information to understand current job trends and employer needs in Cook County and its 200 municipalities.

Note: The Partnership has a person on staff who can help organizations answer specific data questions using real time labor market information. Call The Partnership's Program Development Specialist at: (312) 603-0200.



## Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

<https://www.cael.org/>

CAEL champions adult learners by bringing together educators, employers and regions to create solutions that integrate work and learning in ways that have recognizable and relevant value to employers.

### ***Specific Resources to Check Out***

- Occupational Overview, Applying Skills to the Labor Market, Skills Transfer
  - [Competency Mapping Resources for Retail and Adjacent Industries](#):<sup>19</sup> These resources illustrate the competencies developed within retail jobs and how they may transfer to advancement opportunities. Specifically, they can be used to demonstrate to employers the value of skill-building that occurs in retail, inform training development, support effective advising on career pathways within retail and adjacent industries, and help workers understand the skills and competencies they develop in various retail occupations.

### ***What the Website Is Good For***

- Talent management resources to help employers improve their approach to human resources, organizational development, and business strategy.
- Understanding retail career pathways.



## Glassdoor

<https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm>

Glassdoor is a website that collects reviews and salary information on companies posted by current and former employees.

### ***Specific Resources to Check Out***

- Job/Employer Search
  - [General Website](#)<sup>20</sup> to discover job listings and company reviews
  - [Salaries](#)<sup>21</sup> - Scroll to the bottom of the page to find out information on general salary levels for specific industries and helpful advice about how to discuss salary topics with employers
  - [Interviewing Tips](#)<sup>22</sup>
  - [Salary Calculator](#)<sup>23</sup> - Free estimate of your professional “worth” based on current labor market information

### ***What the Website Is Good For***

- Getting an insider's perspective on a company and what it's like to work there. This can be a good opportunity to learn more about a company's job quality record and retention stats. (Note: it's important to keep in mind that comments from very happy and very disgruntled employees may skew what you can learn.)
- Researching common interview questions for a given company
- Identifying realistic salary ranges for certain titles at a company

## Illinois Work Net

<https://www.illinoisworknet.com/>

Illinois Work Net is the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's website dedicated to expanding job opportunities to citizens across Illinois. It is also tied to the U.S. Department of Labor's American Job Center initiative.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Occupational Overview
  - DCEO's [Illinois WorkNet](#)<sup>24</sup> Career Information
- Job/Employer Search
  - Illinois workNet [JobFinder](#)<sup>25</sup>
  - Illinois workNet [Featured Employers](#)<sup>26</sup>

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Exploring career pathways and getting quick facts on specific professions
  - Using IL data to find in-demand jobs
  - Finding recent job postings that match clients' skills and interests
  - Identifying employers currently hiring throughout IL
- 

## LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/>

LinkedIn is a professional social media site. It features the ability to create a digital profile /resume and the option to join various groups and forums to share professional news (e.g., articles, videos, etc.). LinkedIn also has a section geared towards learning new skills (and refreshing old ones!) entitled *LinkedIn Learning*.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Job/Employer Search
  - [LinkedIn Job Search](#)<sup>27</sup>
  - Look through your connections to see if you know anyone who works directly at or has a contact at a company your client might be applying to.

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Discovering current job openings in your area
- Finding jobs related to jobs you've already identified
- Leveraging your professional network to find connections at new companies
- Broadcasting your interest and dedication to the field by sharing relevant articles with your network



## My Next Move

<https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip>

This website helps identify your interests and how they match with different professions.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Interests & Values Assessment
  - [My Next Move](#)<sup>28</sup> Interest Profiler ([Spanish](#)<sup>29</sup> version)
- Skills Transfer
  - [My Next Move for Veterans](#)<sup>30</sup>
- Job/Employer Search
  - Once the assessment is filled out, you can filter for current education status and see which job postings in the area best match your interests (per the assessment).

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Helping individuals who might not know exactly what they want to do professionally
  - Identifying individuals' interests and matching them to current job openings in their area
  - Translating military experience into related civilian skills
  - Taking into account individuals' current educational status when matching them to jobs
- 

## My Skills, My Future

<http://www.myskillsmyfuture.org/>

My Skills, My Future is part of the Career One Stop website. It focuses on identifying transferable skills.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Skills Transfer
  - Input your current or past job to find out about other related professions and how your skills transfer to these other jobs.

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Exploring other professional options with your current skills
- Understanding the income ranges in your area for jobs with your current skills
- Discovering the training/certification requirements for specific jobs
- Identifying occupations based on hearing, vision, physical strength, outdoor work, and other possible limiting factors

## O\*NET

<https://www.onetonline.org/>

O\*NET is a U.S. Department of Labor website dedicated to providing public access to the O\*NET database, which features information on over 900 occupations and the Standard Occupational Classification system.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Occupational Overview
  - Browse by [interests](#)<sup>31</sup>
  - Browse by [outlook](#)<sup>32</sup>
  - Browse by [skill](#)<sup>33</sup>
  - [O\\*NET Resource Guide](#)<sup>34</sup>
- Interests & Values Assessment
  - Similar to interests are [work values](#)<sup>35</sup>
- Applying Skills to the Labor Market
  - [O\\*Net Skills Section](#)<sup>36</sup>

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Exploring career options based on interests or skills
  - Determining the demand for specific professions
  - Identifying transferable skills from previous jobs
- 

## Reimagine Retail Chicagoland Website

<https://www.reimagine retailchicago.org/>

This website caters to the needs of those wishing to work and advance in the retail space. It highlights opportunities for trainings, certifications, employment assistance, etc. Additionally, it features a section on helping retail employers with retention.

### **Specific Resources to Check Out**

- Skills Transfer / Credentials & Certifications
  - Fill out the brief form on the webpages and highlight the information you are interested in finding out more about.

### **What the Website Is Good For**

- Connecting individuals to trainings that will prepare them for the retail industry
- Identifying certification or customized coaching options being offered by community based organizations



## Additional Resources

### Skills Transfer

- [My Skills, My Future](#)<sup>37</sup> (This tool also allows for filtering of occupations based on Hearing, Vision, Physical Strength, Outdoor Work, and other possible limiting factors)

### For Veterans

- [Military Crosswalk Search](#)<sup>38</sup>
- [Veterans ReEmployment](#)<sup>39</sup>

### Employment Projections and Trends

- [Illinois Projections](#)<sup>40</sup> (including local projections by [Local Workforce Investment Area](#))<sup>41</sup>
- [Compare employment trends](#)<sup>42</sup> by occupation at CareerOneStop
- Real-Time Demand: Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership [Where Are the Jobs](#)<sup>43</sup> reports

### Chicago/Cook County Major Players

- [Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership](#)<sup>44</sup>
- [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning](#)<sup>45</sup> (CMAP)
- CMAP [Industry Clusters](#)<sup>46</sup> page

### Miscellaneous

- Chicago Public Library [Resources](#)<sup>47</sup>
  - [Brainfuse](#):<sup>48</sup> (Library Card Required for Login) Get help with writing, citizenship tests, GED studying, and resume feedback, all free!
  - [Chicago Digital Learn](#):<sup>49</sup> Tools for learning and increasing digital skills for various tasks



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1

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### Research & Planning



## Employer Relationship Development: Preparing for the First Meeting and Beyond

Developing and nurturing employer relationships is a long-term endeavor that should be grounded in the desire to determine the best ways you can be of support to one another. This will happen over time, but it all starts with an initial meeting! Understanding as much as possible about a company is important to both ensuring effective preparation of your job seekers and identifying retailers that are a good fit for them. You'll want to learn about:


- Job requirements and qualifications needed
- Information about jobs that are not included in job descriptions
- Your personal impression of the employer (and the workplace, if you have visited--which you should!)
- What workers can expect if hired
- Application and interviewing procedures

Uncovering this information typically happens in two, overlapping phases. First, you can do a little "desk research" on your own (see [Where to Find Employers](#) and [Using Labor Market Information](#) for tips on where to start). Information you might want to research in advance includes:

- Mission/value proposition of the company
- Size of the company
- Locations (both local and national)
- Open positions (including an understanding of job description(s))
  - Wages and benefits being offered
  - Skills needed
  - Hours and shifts required
- The company's competition (both retail and non-retail)

Being armed with this type of information prepares you to have a more informed conversation with the employer when you do meet and demonstrates that you've taken the time and care to learn about their business.

Second, you will want to talk with retailers directly. It's the only way to develop the expertise you need to be helpful to both your clients and the businesses that employ them. Since it's the only



way to build new or deepen existing professional relationships (and you likely have limited time and resources), get out in the field early and often to talk to retailers.

### Timing is Key

Because timing is everything when working with retailers, it's helpful to know about their selling, budgeting and planning cycles:

- The retail fiscal calendar is typically February 1 – January 31. This allows retailers to report their year-end sales from the holiday season (if they are a publicly held company).
- The “holiday” shopping season can start as early as the beginning of October and last through January due to returns. Many retailers refer to this period of time in stores as “black-out,” meaning no activities can happen other than preparing for the holidays. Some retailers’ “holiday” shopping seasons are different than the typical year-end time-period. For example, home improvement stores have their busiest time in the spring and warm weather months when customers are remodeling, gardening, setting-up outdoor living spaces, or buying grills. Be aware of when the “holiday” or busiest shopping season(s) are for any employers you are working with so you can avoid approaching them at an inopportune time. Alternatively, headquarters and HR staff are often less busy during the holiday shopping seasons as they can’t engage with store staff as readily during this time. This can be good timing to meet with them to explore new training programs and approaches for the following year.
- Many retailers begin their annual budgeting process in September and end it around the close of their fiscal year (typically January). Thus, if you want an employer to consider providing training that impacts labor budget dollars and/or training costs that increase their budget from year to year, this is the time to work with them.
- Be aware of other strategic initiatives or leadership changes that can affect the timing and readiness of a retailer to work with you. They may be rolling out a new product line, trying out a new business model, acquiring another organization, or going through financial challenges (e.g., closing stores, being acquired, or being sold). These activities may make it difficult to get retailers to focus on workforce development.





### **The Benefits of Knowing Multiple Employees**

Quality employer engagement means being prepared to have multiple, in-depth and broad-ranging conversations with hiring and workplace managers in order to develop strong partnerships. From shift supervisors to HR directors to corporate responsibility managers, there are many leverage points within a business. Knowing what to ask, when to ask it, and how to approach the hierarchy of roles within a company will help you access different information and ultimately deepen the relationship you have with the business. For example, you might talk to a shift supervisor or HR manager about open positions and the nature of the work, but not about overall operations, job design, or business strategy. Questions about those topics might be better saved for retail store managers and company executives.

Don't be thrown off by an employee's title, however. You never know where you'll find an advocate within the company, particularly because advocates may differ across small, mid, and large sized companies or even within and across big-box stores. For example, conventional wisdom tells us to look to a company's corporate social responsibility team because they are concerned with their community impact, or to human resources because they have decision-making control over the company's workforce practices and job quality measures. While all are safe bets, your first contact might end up being with a shift supervisor, accounting staffer, or part-time employee. Don't underestimate the power these individuals have to advocate for change within their company! Finally, developing relationships with individuals at multiple levels of a company not only helps you gain diverse and valuable insight, it also protects you from losing an employer entirely if one of your contacts moves on.

### **Where to Find the Influencers & Decision Makers in a Retail Organization**

- Small, locally owned retail stores—Owner
- Franchise-owned stores—Franchise Owner
- Retailers headquartered in your city or state—Corporate Store Operations and Human Resources leaders, and/or District/Market Managers and District/Market Human Resources Leaders
- Retailers not headquartered in your city or state—District/Market Managers and District/Market Human Resources Leaders

Below is a link to a question bank that is designed to help you craft learning-focused conversations with retail store managers. Based on your objectives, you can pick and choose a mix of questions. You can use the tool to help you learn about a business with an eye toward providing services. Or you might use the tool to help you identify retailers that are a good fit for the job-seekers you serve (e.g., asking about scheduling practices, benefits, paid-time-off, etc.). Asking these types of questions of multiple businesses in your region can also help you develop expertise on local industry norms. This can put you in a good position for communicating with businesses about how their practices stack up against their local competitors for workers.

Relationships take time and more than one conversation to build. So you may find that some questions feel right for first discussions and others might be more comfortable once you've

established rapport. In either case, starting from a place of inquiry – asking employers about their workforce needs in the context of business goals, operations and culture – can help you to establish a knowledge base about practices in the sector, identify the retailers you want to build relationships with, and give you standing in discussions about strategies for promoting worker retention and advancement.

To help guide you to the questions that are most relevant for your organization and the stage of your relationship with a business, the Question Bank is divided into three categories:

- I. Questions to Understand the Business and its Workforce
- II. Questions About Employee Engagement, Development, and Advancement
- III. Questions About Compensation and Scheduling

[Question Bank for Workforce Service Providers: A Tool for Working with Retailers.](#)<sup>1</sup>



## Resources Used

- [Reimagine Retail Question Bank](#),<sup>2</sup> The Aspen Institute, Economic Opportunities Program
- [Job Development Essentials: a guide for job developers](#),<sup>3</sup> Laura Wyckoff and Carol Clymer, a publication of Public/Private Ventures
- [The Chicago Jobs Council's Frontline Focus Training Institute](#),<sup>4</sup> FFTI provides professional development and training resources to support effective service delivery in the workforce development field. Visit this link to see a list of course offerings, special initiatives, and other resources for the field.



## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/question-bank-for-workforce-service-providers-a-tool-for-working-with-retailers/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/question-bank-for-workforce-service-providers-a-tool-for-working-with-retailers/>

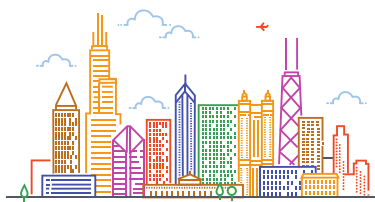
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/job-development-essentials-a-guide-for-job-developers-second-edition.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://cjc.net/frontline-focus/>

## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Research & Planning

## Talking with Employers About Workplace Practices



Not all retail employers are created equal. Some have scheduling practices that provide predictable and adequate hours that help employees earn consistent income and balance work, school, and family responsibilities. Other retailers provide workers their schedules with short notice, make a habit of last-minute changes, and ask employees to keep their availability open so they can work any shift. Wages and benefits can vary a lot from retailer to retailer. Onboarding, training and performance feedback practices also vary. And there's the human factor: some managers and supervisors receive good training or have better instincts about managing people than do others. Company policies and practices that keep employees from bringing their best selves to work may not be intentional.

As we're learning about retailers and looking for those that offer opportunities that are a good fit for the workers we serve, we have to consider a number of factors. We want to prioritize work with businesses that offer good fit, high quality employment. But in practice, we also know that we all serve some [jobseekers who need immediate income](#).<sup>1</sup> Retailers with lower job quality (and high turnover) may also be among those that are also always hiring. At the same time, while we may not want to exclude employers (and those with high turnover might be receptive to making improvements that would lower it), some jobs are harmful to workers. For example, workers with thin employment history certainly need income, but adding negative employment experiences to their resume doesn't help them in the longer term. (See [Now or Never: Heeding the Call of Labor Market Demand](#)<sup>2</sup> by Steven Dawson for more on this).

As you think about engaging employers, it can be helpful to think about establishing some standards around job quality. Workforce development leaders may find it helpful to engage colleagues from other organizations and other key stakeholders (such as job-seekers and employers) in crafting a regional definition that can help set a common standard. Certainly basic conditions such as safety and adherence to local and federal employment laws should be the floor for any employer you choose to work with. But what about living wages, health benefits, paid time off, education and training opportunities, promotion and advancement opportunities, scheduling practices, retirement plans, etc.? How do you think about balance among these factors? More difficult to measure - but equally important - are the intangible aspects of a quality job, such as a supportive work environment and a respectful supervisor. As you talk with an employer (and workers when you have the opportunity), you will be seeking to learn about their workplace, their approach to management, and more. (See [Preparing for the First Meeting: Developing Questions](#))

You can't work intensively with all the businesses you engage with. So based on what you are learning, you might think about developing a system by which you organize information about and rank employers relative to a number of different job attributes. Your standards should reflect the range of what you learn from conversations and the types of characteristics that make jobs

a good fit for the job-seekers you serve. For example, the chart below offers a way to rank businesses' employment practices across four different levels (1 being the best; 4 the worst). It is formulated based on the assumption that clients seek full-time employment.

	Level 1 (Top-Ranked)	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 (Bottom-Ranked)
Wages	Entry-level positions pay over \$15/hr	Entry-level positions pay \$13- \$15/hr	Entry-level positions pay \$13- \$15/hr	Entry-level positions pay minimum wage or below (\$13/hr beginning July 1, 2019)
Paid Time-Off (PTO)	More than 5 days of PTO in first year	5 days of PTO in first year	Some accrual of PTO after 6 months-1 year of employment	No PTO
Scheduling Practices	Shifts are set, predictable and equate to 40+ hours/week	Shifts are scheduled quarterly in advance and equate to 30-40 hours/week	Shifts are scheduled two weeks in advance, but are unpredictable and equate to ~30 hrs/week	Shifts are scheduled last minute, unpredictable and, equate to ~20 hrs/week
Health Benefits	Health benefits offered for full-time and part-time workers within 60 days	Health benefits offered for full-time workers after 60 days	Health benefits offered to full-time workers after 1 year	No health benefits offered
Education Benefits <sup>3</sup>	Full tuition reimbursement offered to both full and part-time workers for all post secondary degrees and schedule/shift accommodations provided to attend classes	Partial tuition reimbursement for full-time staff only and schedule/shift accommodations provided to attend classes	No tuition reimbursement but schedule/shift accommodations provided to attend classes	No education benefits offered
Hiring Policies	Exhibits inclusive hiring practices (i.e. has written job descriptions, policies, and clear onboarding process etc.)	Committed to inclusive hiring practices (i.e. has written job descriptions, policies, and clear onboarding process etc.) but practices, though standardized, do not proactively foster inclusivity	Some transparency in hiring process, but practices do not proactively foster inclusivity and the process is not standardized	No transparency in hiring process (i.e. no written job descriptions, policies, and no clear onboarding process)
Career Pathway / Advancement Opportunities	Well-documented, transparent, equitable advancement opportunities available and communicated to all	Well-documented advancement opportunities available and communicated to all staff (including paid internships and	Some advancement opportunities exist but are not transparent, well-documented or	No clear advancement opportunities

	staff; staff encouraged and supported to move up within the company (including paid internships and apprenticeship program)	apprenticeship program)	communicated to staff	
Supportive Supervision <sup>4</sup>	Formal mentorship program and quality, supportive supervision provided (i.e. supervisors are trained and measured / evaluated on supervisory practices)	Employees encouraged to find mentors but program is not formalized; supervisors provide structured, periodic employee performance feedback	No mentorship program, though it is not discouraged; supervisory relationships are clear, but regular employee performance feedback is not provided	No mentorship program, nor is it encouraged; minimal, unclear supervision provided
Organizational Culture*	Diversity and inclusion fostered through the provision of necessary and timely professional development, clear channels for upward feedback, quality supervision, etc.	Commitment to both diversity and inclusion; practices are in-progress	Stated diversity and inclusion mission but limited alignment with that value in practice	No stated commitment to diversity and inclusion

\*See The Aspen Institute's [Question Bank for Workforce Service Providers: A Tool for Working with Retailers](#)<sup>5</sup> to identify particular questions that you could ask of employers to gain insight into their organizational culture.

\*\*This chart modified from *Growing Home's Employer Classification Chart* (Chicago based workforce development agency)

\*\*\*The ratings in this chart assume worker(s) need/want full-time work. You and your organization can develop metrics for job seekers seeking part-time work.

It is unlikely that all of an employer's practices will fall squarely into one level. More likely their practices will straddle categories across the chart. What this chart (or other ranking system) allows you to do is take stock of your employer relationships to see where they fall on a job quality continuum. This can help you develop new targets for employer engagement. For example, if you discover that many of your employers are falling into the bottom-ranked levels, you might want to target recruitment of employers with better workforce and workplace practices. A chart like this can also help you have a conversation with an employer about the ways in which they might improve the quality of their jobs. You can point out areas of improvement for them, show them this chart, and then follow-up with resources to help them move toward new goals. An additional tool that can spur conversations with businesses about job quality and employment practices is The Aspen Institute's [Cost of Turnover tool](#).<sup>6</sup> Knowing the cost of turnover, or even the types of costs associated with turnover, can encourage managers to reflect on workplace practices that reduce it.

For more information on job quality practices and high-road employment, see the links below.



## More Resources

The American Sustainable Business Council Report: *The High-Road Workplace: Route to a Sustainable Economy*. <http://asbcouncil.org/high-road-workplace-report#.XlkyO-hKiUl>

The American Sustainable Business Council: *Principles of High Road Employers*.  
[http://asbcouncil.org/sites/default/files/principles\\_of\\_high\\_road\\_employers.pdf](http://asbcouncil.org/sites/default/files/principles_of_high_road_employers.pdf)

The Pinkerton Papers: *Now or Never: Heeding the Call of Labor Market Demand*, Steven Dawson. <http://www.thepinkertonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pinkerton-Papers-No6-Dawson-WEB-FINAL.pdf>

Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation: Employer Toolkit.  
<https://toolkit.cincinnatiwomensfund.org/>

The Good Jobs Institute at MIT: <https://goodjobsinstitute.org/what-is-a-good-job/>

Pacific Community Ventures: <https://www.pacificcommunityventures.org/2016/04/14/defining-and-measuring-the-creation-of-quality-jobs/>

Raise the Floor and Build Ladders: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/raise-the-floor-and-build-ladders-workforce-strategies-supporting-mobility-and-stability/>

NFWS's job design framework: [https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Job\\_Design\\_Framework\\_M5.pdf](https://nationalfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Job_Design_Framework_M5.pdf)



## To think about ways to use these metrics:

JVS essay: <https://www.tbf.org/what-we-do/strategic-focus-areas/jobs/catapult/catapult-papers-discussion/catapult-p-3>

National Fund's "Job Design Framework," at <https://nationalfund.org/job-quality-resource-center/>

Business-facing tool designed to help employers understand best practices in Opportunity Employment: [FSG's Opportunity Navigator tool](#)<sup>7</sup>

The Aspen Institute, Economic Opportunities Program, Upskill America and I4CP, [Key Elements of Successful Tuition Assistance Programs: A New Model for Workforce Development](#)<sup>8</sup>




## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/06/Now-Jobs-In-Young-Adult-Workforce-Programming.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thepinkertonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Pinkerton-Papers-No6-Dawson-WEB-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Tuition assistance programs are evolving to be more learner-friendly (i.e. flexible about what credentials and degrees are supported, reimbursement of tuition and fees upfront, no pay-back policies, etc.). There is growing recognition that program design affects usage and outcomes. Learn more about tuition assistance versus tuition reimbursement here: <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/key-elements-of-successful-tuition-assistance-programs-a-new-model-for-workforce-development/>





<sup>4</sup> Some store managers/leaders' compensation may be tied to the "people" side of their work. They may be held accountable for turn-over/retention metrics, internal promotions and/or lateral moves among staff, completion of required training by staff, training related to onboarding, and coaching/career development conversations.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/question-bank-for-workforce-service-providers-a-tool-for-working-with-retailers/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/cost-of-turnover-tool/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://opportunitynavigator.org/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/key-elements-of-successful-tuition-assistance-programs-a-new-model-for-workforce-development/>



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Section 2

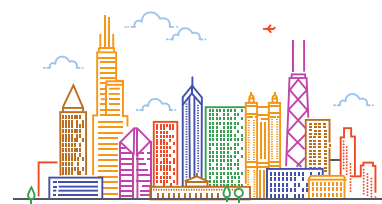
### Contacting Employers



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Contacting Employers

## Pitching Your Services



Pitching is a key skill to develop in your work with employers. But what is it exactly? Often we think of a 'pitch' as a speech designed to sell someone on your products or services. While this is true, in the workforce development field, pitching is much more nuanced. When working with employers, a major goal is to identify the ways in which we can help support their business needs and provide solutions to their challenges. To do this, we need to be good listeners and ask lots of questions—two things that don't immediately come to mind when we think about pitching. Having our talking points in order is certainly a major part of this interaction, but the actual "pitch" should look more like a dialogue in which you ask questions to learn about employer's pain points and then share how you can provide solutions. Questions you can ask to better understand an employer's needs are covered in the *Preparing for the First Meeting: Developing Questions* (link) section of this toolkit. What follows here is intended to prepare you to talk about your services in ways that will resonate with an employer and open the door to future conversations. Specifically, it will address:

- Avoiding workforce jargon and using plain language
- Moving from a mission-based to a service-based pitch
- Quantifying the value of your services
- Developing a flexible script
- Overcoming employer objections



### Avoid Workforce Jargon, Use Plain Language

Jargon abounds in the workforce development field. Our social service parlance—words and phrases like "barriers," "JRT," "soft skills," even titles like "job developer" or "employment specialist"—can sound like a foreign language to employers. To bridge this communication gap, it is important to translate our social service jargon into business speak that will help us communicate effectively with retail managers.



Example Social Service Jargon	Translated to Business Speak
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Job Readiness Training (JRT)</li><li>– Asset-based/Client-centered</li><li>– 21st Century Skills/Employability Skills</li><li>– Job Developer</li><li>– Case management</li><li>– Names of contracts/grants (e.g. WIOA, CDBG, TANF, etc.)</li><li>– Upskilling</li><li>– Wrap-around services</li><li>– Incumbent workers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Trained or Ready to Work</li><li>– Focused on connecting qualified candidates with quality employment opportunities</li><li>– Employees who have customer service skills, are team-oriented, effective at time management, etc.</li><li>– Motivated, ready to work</li><li>– Staffing specialist</li><li>– Employee Assistance Program services</li></ul>



**Mission versus Service-Based Pitching**

When pitching to employers, it is important to appeal to both their hearts and minds. While employers will always be looking to maximize their bottom line, many are also invested in their employees' well-being and the communities in which they operate. When you can offer a solution to their immediate hiring needs while also helping them meet their "social mission," it's a win for everyone. That being said, one of the major pitfalls when pitching to employers is to focus too much on the mission of *your* organization rather than on the value of the services and solutions you bring to *their* business. Employers are likely to be invested in the mission of your organization to the extent that it helps them address their challenges, improve their business, and meet their own more intangible sense of purpose (e.g., being rated a quality place to work; being voted best neighborhood business; making charitable contributions that support the local community; providing opportunities for staff to volunteer and support your job seeker constituents, etc.). When you approach an employer from a deficit-based perspective, asking them to "give your job seekers a chance," they are not likely to understand how you or your job seekers can and will provide value to their business. However, you, your organization, and your job seekers have tremendous value to add and your pitch should reflect that! The difference between these two pitch approaches is outlined below.

AVOID THIS KIND OF PITCH! Mission Based Pitches . . .	PRACTICE THIS KIND OF PITCH! Service Based Pitches . . .
Focus only on what your organization does for job seekers, not employers	Focus on what your organization does for employers rather than job seekers
Describe how the employer can help you—how they can help fulfill <i>your</i> mission	Describe the <i>value</i> and <i>benefit</i> you can bring to the employer, how you are a solution to their need(s)
Only describe the general elements of your organization without mentioning specific outcomes	Get employers' attention with something that makes you <i>attractive</i> and <i>unique</i>
Use language the employer doesn't understand	AVOID acronyms and social service jargon

### BAD Example

"I work with Second Chance Services. We work with returning citizens and are funded by WIOA, CDBG, TANF, etc. Second Chance is a 40-year-old organization started by the esteemed Martin Robinson whose own son fell victim to the streets. Martin found employment to be the answer to keeping future generations out of life on the streets. At Second Chance we provide resume writing assistance, substance-abuse treatment, anger management classes, housing assistance and job placement services. I have some job seekers who are looking for retail work. They're really good people, just a little down on their luck, looking to turn their lives around. It would mean a lot for you to hire them. I'll leave their resumes here and then you can call me if you want to hire them. Sound good?"

### GOOD Example

"I can help you with your hiring needs. I work for an organization that connects employers with qualified candidates. I'm currently working with three individuals who possess the customer service, punctuality, and time management skills you said you're looking for. I also helped the store down the street increase their employee retention by 50% by adopting a new scheduling approach that allows their employees to plan three months in advance. I would be happy to connect you with the store manager as a reference to learn more. After you have a chance to talk, perhaps we can set up another meeting where I can learn more about your organization, understand some of the challenges you're facing, and identify some ways my organization can help? In the meantime, I can send you the resumes of the candidates I have in mind and then follow up with you next week at your convenience to see if you'd like to move forward with interviews."

Also, don't forget to alter your pitch based on who you're talking to within a company. See the Employer Relationship Development: Preparing for the First Meeting and Beyond callout section, "[The Benefits of Knowing Multiple Employees](#)" for more on this.



## Quantifying the Value of Your Services

One way to think about the value of your services is in the time and/or money saved by the employer. The chart below lists some common services your organization might provide to businesses, as well as blank space where you can note the value of those services. If you don't know how much time you and your staff save for employers, do some research! You can begin tracking your own hours, having conversations with your trusted employer contacts about the time and money each of these activities costs, or meeting with human resource associations to see if they benchmark any of this data. Knowing this information will help you add specificity to your pitch and will resonate with the employer's bottom line. The Aspen Institute's [Cost of Turnover Tool](#)<sup>1</sup> can be extremely helpful in calculating these benefits.

You can fill in the right side of this chart for your organization. For each of the services on the left, estimate on your own the amount of time you might save for a business partner. You can do this by calculating the amount of labor hours your organization puts toward a service, or you can ask your business partners how much time it saves them when you take on a service on their behalf.

Your Service	Benefit or Value to Employers
Collecting and reviewing resumes	
Prescreening candidates (e.g., vetting, sending job seekers who are a good fit)	
Refining job descriptions	
Scheduling interviews	
Troubleshooting (when things go wrong)	
Supporting employees post-placement	
Finding replacement workers	
Resource brokering (tax credits, etc.)	
Developing and delivering customized training for existing workforce, including front-line workers and supervisors	
Other?	





## Developing a Flexible Script

Once you've quantified the value of your services and translated your social service jargon into plain, accessible language, it can be helpful to develop talking points to address common business challenges. These talking points can then be tailored based on the employer you're talking to, the challenge they've identified, how much time you have, their location, etc. You never know where you're going to meet a potential employer contact, so a flexible script can help you feel prepared to pitch anywhere, anytime!

Category	Sample Talking Points
General Phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide valuable services to improve your bottom line and help you meet your social mission</li><li>- Provide qualified, job-ready candidates</li><li>- Serve as an extension of your HR department</li><li>- We work with xxx number of employers. I'm happy to connect you to _____ as a reference.</li></ul>
Hiring Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide pre-screened, trained candidates who are ready to work and have received _____ training.</li><li>- Can help you craft job descriptions to truly attract the talent you want/need</li><li>- We conduct hiring fairs and can schedule interviews</li></ul>
Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Our retention rate is xx% (use data!)</li><li>- We provide a swift and on-site response if challenges arise</li><li>- We schedule structured check-ins with both you and the employee (at your convenience) to ensure open and transparent communication about how things are going</li></ul>
Training & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- We provide incumbent worker training</li><li>- We offer a 6-week customer service training to all our job seekers</li><li>- We can customize a training program based on your specific needs</li></ul>
Benefits & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- We can help you promote your company's social mission</li><li>- We can complete the paperwork necessary to help you access tax credits</li><li>- We provide subsidized wages for the first xx days of employment</li><li>- We offer employer engagement breakfasts featuring relevant HR topics and opportunities for networking with your colleagues</li></ul>



## Overcoming Employer Objections

No matter how prepared we might feel going into a conversation with an employer, there will be times they say things that stop us in our tracks. That doesn't mean the conversation has to end there! Below are common "employer objections" along with suggested "comeback" responses to keep the conversation going.

### Bad Experience

#### Employer Objections

- We had a bad experience with your agency
- We had a bad experience with another workforce agency
- The last person you referred was a disaster
- We had a bad experience with someone with a criminal record

#### Response

Regardless of whether the bad experience was your fault or not, apologize and express empathy for the situation

Then, try to probe for more information: Can you tell me more about what went wrong? How can I make it better?

*If the bad experience was with your agency, describe changes that have been or will be made to address the employer's concerns moving forward. Emphasize your role as a resource to them to prevent issues in the future. Let them know their feedback will help you reevaluate your process and address issues internally.*

*If the bad experience was with another agency, highlight the special features that make you/your agency unique (e.g., retention rate, success stories, other employer references).*

*If the bad experience was related to a particular candidate who didn't work out, acknowledge how upsetting that must have been for the employer. But also remember that you cannot make guarantees about job seekers' performance or behavior once on the job. We're all human, and it's important to remember that the job seeker will have a perspective on why things didn't work out as well. The best you can do is refer an employer the most qualified candidate for the job. And assure them you're doing everything you can to be a trusted referral partner for them (which means sending qualified candidates--not overpromising and under-delivering--and maintaining transparency with the employer).*

Finally, let the employer know that you value open communication. Remind them that they can call you anytime to prevent issues from escalating in the future.



## Brushhoff

### **Employer Objections**

- Apply online
- I'll call you back later
- I don't have time
- I don't have time to learn new processes or deal with the paperwork
- Leave the paperwork and we'll get back to you
- I'll forward this along to my coworker
- All contracts have to go through our legal department
- We're not hiring right now
- I work with another staffing agency
- We have an in-house staffing organization
- We don't use outside sources
- We hire from within

### **Response**

"Apply online" is such a common dialogue stopper it warrants its own strategies! In today's world of applicant tracking systems, it's unlikely you're going to get around the requirement that your job seekers apply online. However, there are several things you can do to help your clients stand out.

First, you want to understand everything you can about how their online system works. Ask questions!

- Who's responsible for reviewing applications?
- Is it possible to meet with that person?
- Does application review happen locally, regionally, or nationally?
- Are there certain keywords or qualities that will help my candidates stand out?
- How long does the application stay in your system?
- Are there tips or tricks to the online system I should be aware of (e.g., Does it have to be completed in one session? Is there a personality test?)

Second, you want to do your best to develop a relationship with the hiring manager. Say:

- Great, I'll have my candidates apply online. Can I follow up afterwards?
- Can I send you my candidates' resumes/names so you can flag them in the system when they come through?
- Can we set up a meeting so I can better understand the type of candidates you're looking for? That way I will refer only candidates I think are a good fit.

- Do you have any other workforce challenges (besides hiring) that I can help you with?

There are many ways for an employer to reject your services. And it can often happen before they even know what they're rejecting! The employer objections in the brush-off category are often knee-jerk responses given because the employer doesn't yet understand the value of your services.

If the employer indicates they don't have time or will get back to you, try to keep the ball in your court. Ask if you can set up another time to talk when it's more convenient. Or let them know you'll call back at a specific date and time and confirm that works for them.

If the employer says they're not hiring right now, ask when they will be! Ask if you can be in touch when that time comes around again. If you offer any other services (e.g., incumbent worker training, employer roundtables, help writing job descriptions, etc.), see if you can develop a relationship around your other services so that when their hiring season comes around, you'll be the first person they turn to.

If the employer says they work with another staffing agency, ask which one. Let them know you can partner with that other agency in order to expand the employer's applicant pool. If the employer ever has needs that the other agency can't fill, have them keep you in mind.

Finally, if the employer says they don't work with staffing agencies or only hire from within, mention some of the services you offer that will save them time and money. Say you're not trying to upset a process they already have in place, but you think you might be able to bring them value and serve as an extension of their HR department.

## Skepticism

### Employer Objections

- There's too much paperwork
- What makes you different?
- What makes your *clients* different?
- You're just another government program

### Response

Employer skepticism can best be addressed by explaining your process and the value you bring to their business. Mention that you can help them save money and time; your services are provided at no cost to them; you provide qualified candidates based on a thorough assessment of the employer's needs; you can act as an extension of their HR department; you can help them file tax credit paperwork, etc.

Additionally, this is an opportunity to dispel myths. Talk about how your agency is funded or how much paperwork there actually is, as well as what makes you unique. Tell them about your performance metrics in terms of retention. Offer employer testimonials from your other satisfied partners.



## Specific Job Seeker Requirements and Employer Bias

### Employer Objections

- The position requires flexible hours
- I don't hire people with employment gaps
- We don't hire people without a GED
- We need people who can drive themselves or have a clean driving record
- We prefer someone with 2 years of experience
- Can your clients pass a drug/background check?
- Not sure your customers would feel comfortable with our culture
- I don't think your candidates would be a good fit
- What's wrong with your clients?

### Response

The dialogue stoppers in this group, couched as job requirements, are often thinly veiled (and sometimes illegal) bias statements. It is important to proceed with caution here. Is what the employer is saying actually related to a requirement of the job? Or is it a way for them to weed out candidates they've deemed "undesirable?"

If it's the former, you can let the employer know you will send them only candidates who meet specific job requirements.

If it's the latter, you might decide that this employer isn't a good match for any of your clients, given the bias you're perceiving. If that's the case, you can make a decision about whether you want to educate the employer about employment law and implicit bias or whether you would rather walk away from the relationship.

In a best case scenario, these situations offer an opportunity to educate employers about bias. If you feel comfortable having that kind of nuanced conversation, please do! However, the safety and satisfaction of your job seekers is paramount, and if you think these will be compromised by a racist or bigoted work environment, you have the power to terminate the relationship.



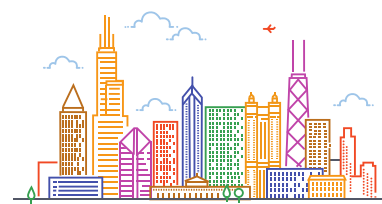
### References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/cost-of-turnover-tool/>

## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Contacting Employers

## Marketing Your Services



Employers are constantly being marketed to, so we need to figure out how to stand out. Whether it's an in-person pitch, a printed brochure, or an online social media post, our marketing needs to demonstrate our value, advertise our services as a solution to their needs, and address employer pain points. At its best, marketing can educate, inspire, and convince--the techniques detailed below will help you do just that!



### Offline Marketing

Develop a pitch to promote your services to an employer that uses data (e.g., retention rates, placement rates, success stories) and presents the "business case" by addressing how you can alleviate their challenges.

- ☑ Work with your team to develop this pitch. An employer may not always contact the same person at an organization, so make sure the information conveyed is consistent.
- ☑ Be sure to use business language and eliminate jargon--both workforce and business--from your pitch. Most employers can tell when you're faking it, and artificially using "their" language is often a sure giveaway. You want the pitch to be as clear and concise as possible, so being authentic in your word choice will ultimately be more effective.
- ☑ Once this pitch has been solidified, work on scaling it to different lengths. This will help you feel confident whether you have 30 seconds or 3 minutes.

When creating flyers and brochures, make sure the material is easy to read and visually appealing. Ensure the most up to date contact information and logos are used on all materials. For example, see the samples from Youth Job Center (YJC) on the following pages.

- ☑ YJC clearly defines the benefits of their services to employers by separating the text into its own special area and using bullets to summarize benefits.
- ☑ The flyer highlights other Employer Partners, which lends credibility to YJC's services.
- ☑ The flyer uniformly displays YJC's contact information and logo at the bottom of each page.
- ☑ While this flyer is designed in color, it would translate well to black and white, if needed, due to the distinct use of color blocking and minimal use of photos.


Leverage existing employer relationships to solicit positive testimonials about your services. These could be used in print materials and online posts.


## Marketing Samples

### Youth Job Center flyer 1 (page 1 of 2)

Youth Job Center Employer Partnership

# Hiring & Training Needs? Think, Youth Job Center!





**Working with YJC is easy**

- No charge for employers or clients
- Comprehensive staffing services
- Pre-screened, qualified applicants
- Customized training programs
- Ongoing retention support

**Paid Work Experience**

Youth Job Center offers paid internships and training opportunities for youth and young adults throughout Chicagoland. Employer partners may work with YJC Clients on a trial basis for up to 200 hours before deciding on permanent hire.

Employer partnership is a key aspect of YJC services. YJC works closely with partners to understand their specific needs and make strong matches between employers and job-seekers.

The Youth Job Center (YJC) provides job-readiness training, and job placement assistance to individuals up to age 25.


In partnership with local employers, the Youth Job Center (YJC) prepares youth for success in the workplace through a wide variety of employment related services. YJC facilitates relationships between youth and employers, building success through trust, dialogue, and continuous learning.

**In-School Youth Programs**

- YJC@
- Summer Corps
- Gap This Way Ahead


**Out-of-School Youth Programs**

- Core
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Career Pathways
- Lasting Impact Initiative



Learn more at [youthjobcenter.org/programs](https://youthjobcenter.org/programs)

Youth Job Center 1114 Church St. Evanston, IL 60201 (847) 864-5627



**Youth Job Center**  
Getting a job. Launching a future.



Youth Job Center Employer Partnership

Join our Network of Employer Partners!



**TARGET**



Learn more at [youthjobcenter.org/programs](http://youthjobcenter.org/programs)

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**Youth Job Center**  
Getting a job. Launching a future.



## Creating a stronger community, one job at a time.



### Who We Are

YJC was founded in 1983 by Ann Jennett to help low-income youth in Evanston find work, primarily short term or seasonal. Today, YJC offers a robust set of services, all of which have the goal of helping clients step onto the path to a lifelong career.

Youth Job Center's mission is: "Success for young people, in the workplace and in life."

YJC's support is not just about job placement and a paycheck. For many, YJC's support leads to increased confidence, a way to contribute to the community and economy, and the ability to take on challenges that result in continued learning and personal growth.

### Where We've Been

YJC has provided direct services in Evanston to youth ages 14-25 since 1983 and expanded into Chicago in 2014, after realizing a substantial number of participants were coming from the city. The focus for many years was on job placement, and recently became more broadly centered on long-term career planning and implementation.

### Where We're Going

YJC envisions a future where all young people have the skills, support, and connections to build a meaningful career and fulfill their potential. To make this future a reality, YJC has identified four initiatives which will serve as guiding principles in the years ahead. These initiatives are:

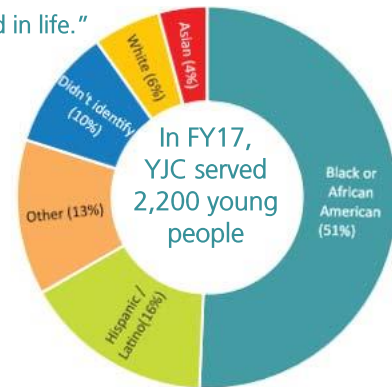
- **Provide options early,**
- **Deliver effective training,**
- **Strengthen employer relations, and**
- **Become a thought leader.**

**1.)** In pursuit of our goal to **provide options early**, YJC will become experts in jobs and career options, work with high schools to expand post-secondary planning, bring employers into training programs, and connect youth to training programs towards career paths.

**2.)** Our work around **delivering effective training** will focus on expanding pre-employment training, placement, and retention support, increasing job shadow and internship opportunities, improving data collection and analysis, and hiring and supporting strong staff.

**3.)** YJC's efforts to **strengthen employer relations** will concentrate on enhancing relations with employers, aligning their needs with the support we offer, and identifying and mitigating barriers youth face through partnerships with other agencies.

**4.)** And finally, YJC will **become a thought leader** by convening those



invested in youth employment such as businesses, employment specialists, educators, and partners.



Learn more at [youthjobcenter.org/programs](http://youthjobcenter.org/programs)

Youth Job Center 1114 Church St., Evanston, IL 60201 (847) 864-5627



**Youth Job Center**  
Getting a job. Launching a future.

## Creating a stronger community, one job at a time.



### YJC Programs

YJC serves two distinct populations: in-school youth (ISY), ages 14-18, and out-of-school youth (OSY), ages 18-25. The ISY Program has two goals: 1.) to successfully connect youth to employment opportunities, primarily seasonal and summer jobs; and 2) to provide effective postsecondary planning to ensure a successful transition at graduation. OSY Programs have the goal of lasting and successful placements in jobs with opportunities for advancement.

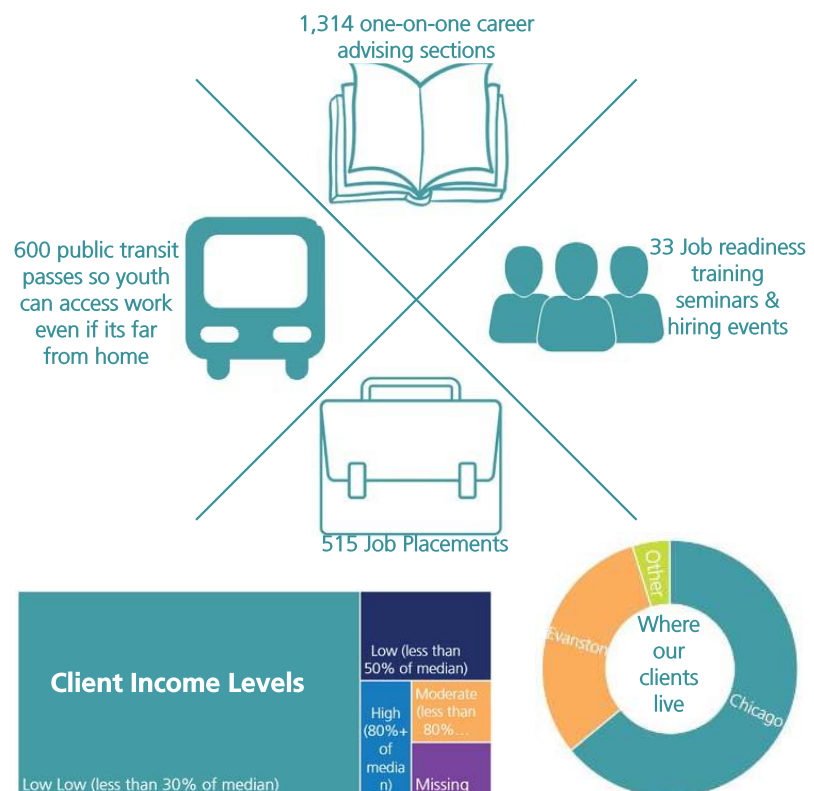
#### ISY Programs:

- YJC@
- Summer Corps
- Gap This Way Ahead

#### OSY Programs

- Core
- WIOA
- Career Pathways
- Lasting Impact

YJC programs address the needs of our community by training and supporting young people to successfully enter the workforce. The agency's Core Services include an updated intake and assessment process, job-readiness training, personalized one-on-one career advising, job referrals and placement, and retention support. Youth explore potential career paths, identify their individual strengths, develop soft skills, research fields of interest, and build their network to support progress toward their desired future.



Learn more at [youthjobcenter.org/programs](http://youthjobcenter.org/programs)

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**YJC Youth Job Center**  
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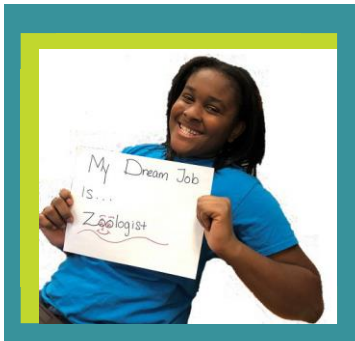
## Youth Job Center brochure

### ABOUT YJC

Youth Job Center provides programs for in-school and out-of-school youth to help find & maintain meaningful employment.

You'll be linked to job opportunities and training programs; and to help you be a success you'll receive one on one support from a Career Advisor (your very own Life Coach!)

- Work Readiness Training
- Job Placement Assistance
- Dedicated Career Advisors
- Training Programs
- Paid Internships



(847) 864-5627



Offices in Evanston  
and  
Englewood



info@youthjobcenter.org



@YouthJobCenter



youthjobcenter1114



Facebook.com/yjcevanston/



## YOUTH JOB CENTER



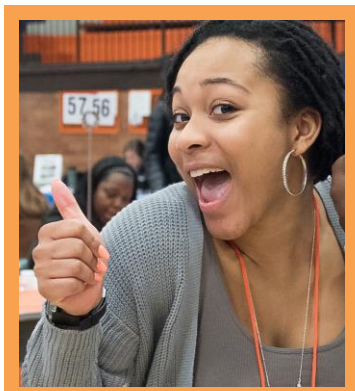
www.youthjobcenter.org

### LOOKING FOR A JOB?

Be referred to open positions with our employer partners! Attend Work Readiness Training. Learn the skills you need to succeed on the job.

- Food and snacks
- Brand new resume
- Interview practice and tips
- Transportation assistance

Sign up for our next training here:  
<http://youthjobcenter.org/jobs/>



### START A CAREER!

#### Career Pathways Program

Sign up for our career pathways program and choose from over 40 different occupations.

Receive free customized training, transportation, uniforms, and tools. Your Career Advisor will work with you one on one until you reach your career goals. Call or email today to get started!



### SUMMER JOB

#### Paid Internship Program

You could be the next intern working at GAP, Old Navy, or Banana Republic!

- June – August
- 10 Week paid internship
- Must be at least 16 yrs. old
- Gift card to purchase clothes
- Generous employee discount

Send an email: [info@youthjobcenter.org](mailto:info@youthjobcenter.org)





"This Way Ahead" internship flyer

# THIS WAY AHEAD



BANANA REPUBLIC

OLD NAVY



Must be 16-24 years old

June 16 - August 24

Work 12 or more hours a week

Gain customer service experience

Get Paid!

Fill out <https://goo.gl/bgrV8w> for more information



Learn more at: [youthjobcenter.org/programs](http://youthjobcenter.org/programs)

Youth Job Center 1114 Church St. Evanston, IL 60201 (847) 864-5627

 Youth Job Center  
Getting a job. Launching a future.



## Online Marketing

### Social Media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram)

- ☑ Connect with relevant employers/organizations by following or liking their pages. You may glean real-time insights about their businesses that wouldn't otherwise be readily available from looking at their website. Additionally, these pages can provide material relevant to your organization's mission and services that you can re-post.
- ☑ Highlight content from your pitch--data, employer testimonials, big wins!
- ☑ Share success stories!
- ☑ Celebrate employer partners and be sure to tag them in your posts to expand their visibility.
- ☑ Ensure your posts are clear and relevant. It always helps to have a second pair of eyes read something before it gets posted.
- ☑ Emulate another organization in your field that has a social media presence you find inspiring. Pay attention to common themes you see in their posts, how often they're posting, the tone of their messaging, how others interact with their posts, etc. For example, below is a [Facebook](#)<sup>1</sup> and [Twitter](#)<sup>2</sup> post from the Youth Job Center in Evanston, IL.



## Organizational website

Your own website is a powerful tool to convey who you are as an organization (i.e., values, mission, history), what services you offer, and your wins. There are many ways you can ensure this information catches an employer's eye. (see National Able as an example:

<https://www.nationalable.org/businesses/>)

- ☑ Feature employer testimonials on your website to showcase your partnerships and add credibility.
- ☑ Highlight your organization's stats--retention rates, placement rates, success stories, etc..!
- ☑ Create a page on your site specifically tailored to employers that highlights your data, testimonials, and key services using business language.

## Emails/Newsletters

- ☑ If you use a web-based, mass-email marketing application like [Mail Chimp](#)<sup>3</sup> or [Constant Contact](#),<sup>4</sup> create an employer email list to push out news on a regular basis.
- ☑ Whether it's on a monthly or quarterly basis, think about highlighting both news your employers can use (e.g., labor market data, new employment law policies, HR topics) as well as celebratory news from your program (e.g., graduation rates, success stories, retention and wage data, new programming or funding, strong partnerships, etc.).



## Free Marketing Support to Tap Into

- ☑ [Canva](#)<sup>5</sup> - This service allows you to design flyers, newsletters, and other images that can be shared across various platforms.
- ☑ [Piktochart](#)<sup>6</sup> - This is a user-friendly application for creating infographics and flyers.
- ☑ [Iconfinder](#)<sup>7</sup> - This service provides icons (both free and for a fee) that can be easily added to flyers.
- ☑ Local Colleges - If your local college has a marketing department, you might be able to tap into pro bono support. Some marketing courses need consulting projects so students can practice new skills and gain experience. Sometimes student teams are available for an academic quarter or semester to consult on a particular issue or provide targeted technical assistance.



## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/yjcevanston/posts/10156028452627256>

<sup>2</sup> <https://twitter.com/YouthJobCenter/status/1114278221489553409/photo/1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mailchimp.com/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.constantcontact.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.canva.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://piktochart.com/>

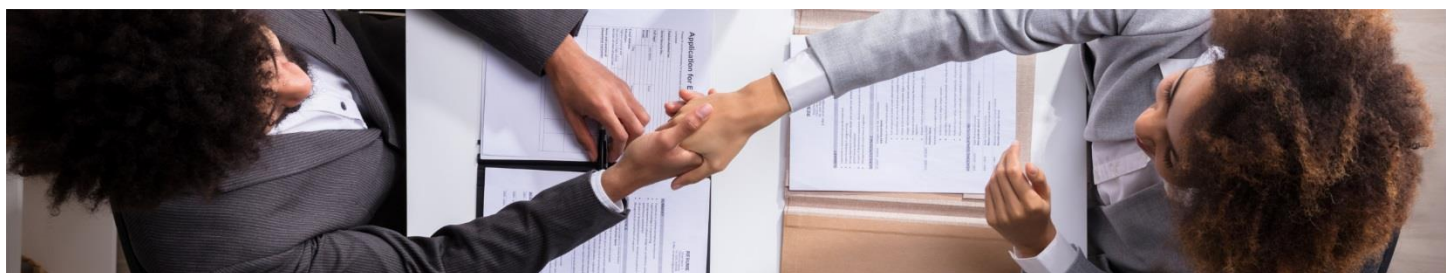
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.iconfinder.com/>



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Section 3

### Deepening Employer Relationships





## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Deepening Employer Relationships

## Involving Employers in Your Organization



There are many ways (and reasons!) to involve employers in your organization beyond the initial hiring relationship. Developing a network of trusted advisors to provide feedback, answer your questions, and serve as ambassadors for your program will help you do your job more effectively. When considering how to involve employers more deeply, think about how to tap into multiple individuals within a company. For example, the CEO, hiring manager, supervisor, or corporate social responsibility manager at one company may provide value to your organization in very different ways ranging from financial contributions to feedback on client job readiness to referrals to other employer partners. Having multiple contacts at one organization can also keep you from having to start the relationship-building process all over again should your primary contact move on.

Regardless of how many contacts you have at an employer, be sure to document every interaction you have in your organization's internal database. Everyone from your receptionist to your development office to your executive suite should have access to employer information (so be careful how you write your notes, since these will be public comments!). You never know how a business will end up interacting with your organization. Multiple touchpoints allow for deeper relationships to develop, so the more information everyone on your staff has, the more effectively you can engage your employers!

When thinking about employer engagement, it can be helpful to plot your relationships on a continuum (see below). You will likely always (and necessarily) have employers at each stage of this continuum. An important goal in developing a strategy to deepen employer relationships, however, is to determine how to move your engagement along this continuum--from potential relationship to advocate. Once you determine where your employers fit along this continuum, it can also be helpful to think about the experience *workers* are having at a company. This too provides important guidance about which businesses you target next and where you invest your time. You might consider creating a matrix that ranks employers along the relationship continuum on one axis and the job quality continuum on the other. This provides a way to understand the value of the employer relationship and what opportunities there might (or might not be) to advocate for workforce practice change.





## Employer Continuum

Potential Relationship	Business Relationship	Trusting Relationship	Advocate Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Knows who you are</li><li>– Understands your services</li><li>– Seems interested</li><li>– Sends you job orders</li><li>– Interviews your referrals</li><li>– Amenable to interview follow-up</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Hires your referrals</li><li>– Accepts your follow-up after the hire</li><li>– Uses services in addition to placement</li><li>– Tolerates occasional unsatisfactory hire</li><li>– Gives input into your organization's training and other services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Counts on you for referrals</li><li>– Hires on your recommendation</li><li>– Lets you know when there is a problem and works with you to fix it</li><li>– Recommends you and your organization to others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Actively participates in your program</li><li>– Gives input into your training and other services</li><li>– Participates on your Advisory Board</li><li>– Provides quotes for the press</li><li>– Speaks and networks with other businesses on your behalf</li></ul>

So, what are some strategies for engaging with employers? One of the best ways is to visit employers on their home turf. Spending time in their stores, taking tours, and participating in any on-site activities when you're welcome allows you to learn more about a business and build relationships. Other methods for involving employers more deeply in your organization are included below:

### Invite your employer partners to...

- ☒ Participate in mock interviews with your clients
- ☒ Tour your facility
- ☒ Speak on an employer panel in your job readiness class
- ☒ Attend or be a sponsor of your annual gala
- ☒ Make a financial contribution
- ☒ Join your board
- ☒ Provide feedback on your training curriculum
- ☒ Host a site visit for prospective job seekers



### Provide your employer partners with...

- ☑ Swag—pens, notepads, calendars, etc. with your agency's logo
- ☑ Timely information, tools and training related to relevant HR topics
- ☑ Updated labor market information related to their industry, including information on competitor practices
- ☑ Seasonal check-ins corresponding to their cyclical hiring needs
- ☑ Space to conduct on-site job interviews

### Show recognition to your employer partners by...

- ☑ Sending thank you notes after a hire
- ☑ Hosting an annual employer appreciation breakfast
- ☑ Honoring an “employer of the month”
- ☑ Spotlighting their accomplishments on your social media accounts
- ☑ Stopping by randomly with coffee or donuts
- ☑ Getting to know them personally and remembering important dates like birthdays and anniversaries



### Additional Resources

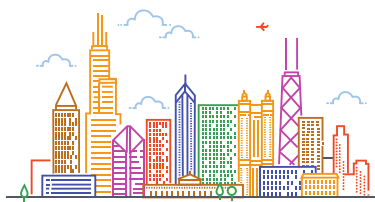
"Employer Engagement and the Myth of the Dual Customer" by Steven Dawson

<http://www.thepinkertonfoundation.org/paper/employer-engagement-and-the-myth-of-the-dual-customer>

## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Deepening Employer Relationships

## Soliciting and Using Employer Feedback



Getting feedback from your employers is important for several reasons. It can help you understand how a particular employee is doing, identify new challenges the employer is facing, uncover ways to improve your own processes, and gauge the employer's level of satisfaction with your services. It can also give you a window into the employer's workplace practices and policies, how frequently they engage with employees to seek input and provide coaching, and what kinds of job-seekers might be a good fit for future referrals. While asking for feedback may feel routine, it is important to be thoughtful in your approach and timing. Providing feedback should not feel like extra work for the employer. Instead it should be folded in as a regular part of your communication. If you have quarterly check-ins with an employer, for example, determining how to incorporate a few extra questions can provide you with the feedback you need.

One simple way to solicit feedback from your employers is to use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) approach. It was developed as a tool for businesses to gauge customer experience and loyalty, but the NPS can be used by your organization to collect standardized feedback on a regular basis.



### What is the Net Promoter Score?


Very simply, the Net Promoter Score is based on one question: "On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to refer [your org or program] to your colleagues as a resource?"



$$\text{NPS} = \% \text{ Promoters} - \% \text{ Detractors}$$

Depending on the number selected by your employer, they will fall into one of the following three categories:

- **Detractors** (scores of 0-6) are highly likely to be talking negatively about their experience
- **Passives** (score of 7 or 8) are generally happy but not enough to be telling others to work with you
- **Promoters** (score of 9 or 10) are enthusiastic about their experience and would be most likely to spread the word



The actual Net Promoter Score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. **NPS = The % of Promoters MINUS The % of Detractors**

So, for example, if 70% of your employers are Promoters, 20% are Passives, and 10% are Detractors, your Net Promoter Score would be  $70 - 10 = 60$ . It is possible to have a negative score, and obviously the higher your score, the better.

The beauty of this question is in its simplicity. You don't have to use the phrase "Net Promoter Score" or show employers the chart above. Rather, you can just pose the question, the employers can click one number, and you can follow-up from there. While the employers' responses won't be anonymous (you'll obviously see them), you will want to make it clear that their responses will not be shared publicly. Rather, they will be used solely to improve your operations internally.

Based on the responses you receive, you can then engage in tailored follow-up conversations with your employers. For responses lower than 9, you will want to understand why and what changes you might implement to earn a higher rating. For responses of 9 or 10, you will want to understand what they appreciate about your service. Perhaps this is a chance to capture some testimonial language you can use on your website or other printed materials. Your goal with these follow-up conversations is to determine what you can keep doing (or do differently) in order to move your employers into the Promoter category.

Collecting NPS ratings can happen in many ways. Perhaps you add the question to a regular quarterly check-in with an employer. Or maybe you include it as a survey question sent out in an employer newsletter. It could even become a part of your email signature if you want to collect the feedback more frequently. Using this standardized question allows you to track individual employer and overall trends over time.

It's important to note, however, that the Net Promoter Score is a means to an end, not an end in itself. In other words, the response to the NPS question provides you a snapshot of your employers' satisfaction. From there, you will want to dive deeper. Developing a set of follow-up questions that can be asked of your employers based on their NPS score can yield great information. For example, on a phone call or in person you might want to ask:

- When were you really impressed with me/the organization?
- What else can we be doing to support your business?
- How, if at all, would you like to be more involved with our organization?
- What would you like me/the organization to do more of/less of?
- How would you describe the value of our services to your business?
- What other colleagues/companies do you think could benefit from our services? Can you connect us?

These questions are just a starting point; you will naturally tailor your follow-up conversations based on the relationship you have with each employer. The NPS merely offers an entree point to deeper, more robust employer conversations. Use it to your advantage!

**Note:** Additional resources to help you calculate your score and tips on how to best use the Net Promoter Score tool can be found online. [SurveyMonkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/)<sup>1</sup> offers a feature to help you develop a Net Promoter Score question and will automatically calculate your score.



## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>



## How to Approach Challenging Conversations with Employers


While we do our best to meet an employer's needs and connect them with qualified candidates, sometimes things just go wrong. Maybe your job seeker client didn't show up on the first day of work or maybe you had a miscommunication with an employer about a deadline. Regardless, you want to repair and rectify the situation.

While these conversations can be difficult, they can also be an opportunity to forge an even deeper relationship with your employer! Much has been written about the concept of "service recovery," the counter-intuitive notion that a customer who has had a bad experience--but whose problem is treated quickly, respectfully and successfully--often becomes an even more loyal customer than if the bad experience had never happened. If you can view these challenging situations as problems to be solved-- and act quickly and proactively--you might just have an employer partner for life!

The steps below can help you craft your approach and response:

1. First, **understand the situation and ask open-ended questions to clarify**. Allow the employer an opportunity to fully explain their problem. Sometimes being really heard is all it takes to defuse a situation. However, also give yourself time to talk with other parties who may be involved (e.g., the worker, other staff, etc.) to understand their perspective(s) as well. In order to move to solution-generation, you want to make sure you truly understand the issue from all sides.
2. Second, once you understand the issue, **take time to reflect!** If you're feeling rattled by an employer's emotion, don't respond right away. Buy yourself some time to calm down, think through solutions, and talk to your co-workers, if necessary. Even if the problem is urgent, give yourself space to gather your thoughts. This might mean asking to call an employer back or involving your supervisor in a follow-up meeting.
3. Third, when you do speak to the employer again, **show empathy** for their challenge. Apologize if necessary and express understanding about how frustrated they must be (even if the problem wasn't your fault). If there was something you could have done differently, own up to the part you played in the problem.
4. Finally, **be future-oriented in generating solutions**. Focus on what you can do moving forward to make the situation right or prevent something like it from happening again. In this phase, you want to be sure to be realistic. The employer may ask for more than you can give--don't over- promise and then under-deliver!

Despite your best efforts, however, there will be situations in which you will need to terminate a relationship with an employer because the "customer" may not always be right. Knowing that you always have the power and the prerogative to walk away is important. For example, you



might learn from your job seekers that a particular employer has been treating its employees unfairly or that supervisors at a firm have been investigated on claims of sexual harassment. Or, when you conduct a site visit to an employer, you might feel bullied and disrespected yourself. In these cases, you will want to do what is best for both you and your job seekers. Having guidelines and protocols in place as an organization can help take the guesswork out of these tricky situations and help you exit these toxic relationships with grace. And while walking away in the moment might be the best course of action, you can always leave the door open to return to a business that demonstrates it's working on employment practices in the future. Staff change can result in culture change which may ultimately lead to a positive working relationship down the road.



## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

**Learn More & Acknowledgments**





## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Learn More



Reimagine Retail Chicagoland is a collaborative group of partners working with retailers to improve the quality of jobs for workers in entry-level positions, create pathways for advancement in retail and related sectors, and increase retention. This effort is part of the national Reimagine Retail initiative at the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program. Reimagine Retail explores ways to enhance stability and improve mobility for the retail workforce by testing strategies, documenting promising practices, and developing new tools.

Across and beyond the Reimagine Retail network, workforce service providers have asked for tools to build their capacity to develop stronger relationships with businesses. This toolkit provides practical resources to deepen business engagement around improving retention, worker mobility, and business performance. This work is made possible through a grant from the Walmart Foundation.

For more information, visit [reimagineretailchicago.org](https://reimagineretailchicago.org) and [aspeninstitute.org/reimagineretail](https://aspeninstitute.org/reimagineretail).

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## Reimagining Employer Engagement: A Toolkit for Providers

### Acknowledgments



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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.reimagineretailchicago.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/economic-opportunities-program/reimagine-retail/>

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### Notes



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[reimagineretailchicago.org](http://reimagineretailchicago.org)