

# Employer Engagement Models supporting a Disability Inclusive Workforce: A How-To Guide



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# What is Work Together NC?

Work Together NC is a statewide initiative funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living (90DNCE0006). The initiative helps employers, service providers, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) *work together* toward an inclusive workforce.

Work Together NC has developed an **IDD Inclusive Employment Alliance** – or a network of employers across North Carolina who demonstrate a commitment to employing people with IDD.

Any NC based employer who completes Work Together NC's ~2 hr self paced training is eligible to apply for recognition as an IDD Inclusive Employer. Employers may qualify as either a bronze, silver, or gold level employer based on the number of workplace accessibility features they self-endorse. Employers must pay at least minimum wage to receive recognition.

A newly recognized "IDD Inclusive Employer" is provided with a contact list of regional or statewide agencies that provide Supported Employment Services to people with IDD. The employer will select a preferred agency and contact that agency for job candidates as job openings become available. Moving forward, the employer and agency collaborate to ensure the candidate receives the support needed to apply, interview, and maintain success at the job.

This how-to guide overviews three innovative employer engagement models (**Coffee Talks, Reverse Job Fairs, and IDD Inclusive Markets**) that can assist Supported Employment providers in expanding their network of employer partners, resulting in improved the employment outcomes for clients with IDD.



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# IDD INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT ALLIANCE

A network of NC based employers committed to hiring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

## IDD INCLUSIVE EMPLOYER



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“The Enthusiasm [of my employees with IDD] around work tasks is valuable for the **WHOLE** team.”

Businesses who hire people with intellectual and developmental disabilities see increases in...



Employee retention  
Workplace morale  
Innovation  
Productivity  
Customer loyalty



Pictured: The owner of Purple Bowl, an acai bowl shop in Chapel Hill, with one of her valued employees!

Take the ~2 hour self paced training & then receive:

- An “IDD Inclusive Employer” sticker for your storefront
- Job candidate referrals
- Contacts for local agencies that provide state funded job coaching and training support



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# Model #1: Coffee Talks



Work Together NC launched IDD Inclusive Employer Coffee Talks in September 2023 as a pilot employer engagement initiative, in partnership with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce. These quarterly events serve as an initial touchpoint with employers, sparking interest and enthusiasm around disability-inclusive hiring. Attendance consistently ranges from 20 to 40 participants per session. Some Coffee Talks have been tailored to specific industries, while others welcome a general employer audience.

## Typical Coffee Talk Agenda:

- ☕ Welcome & Coffee (~5 min)
- 🎤 Panel Discussion with IDD-Inclusive Employers OR a guest speaker (~20 min)
- 💬 Panel of Self-Advocates sharing their employment experiences (~20 min)
- 📊 Brief Overview of IDD-Inclusive Hiring Benefits (~10 min)
- 🤝 Introduction to the IDD Inclusive Employment Alliance + Next Steps (~5 min)

Given the success of the Coffee Talk model, we are eager to replicate this initiative across North Carolina and grow the IDD Inclusive Employment Alliance. Using this guide, any IDD service provider or nonprofit organization interested can partner with their local chamber of commerce to host a Coffee Talk in their community. This collaboration has the potential to create more inclusive job opportunities for your clients while strengthening employer engagement in your area.



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# Attention senior living/senior service employers and hiring managers!

***YOU'RE INVITED...***



To a Coffee Talk to learn how to recruit an underutilized talent pool you may not have yet considered: people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

***WHEN***

February 20th,  
9-10am

***REGISTER***



***WHERE***

Chapel Hill Carrboro  
Chamber of  
Commerce

Presented by...

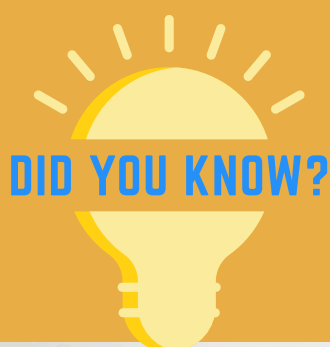


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**The Chamber**  
For a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro

\*Virtual attendance  
option available



Employers who hire people with IDD report lower turnover, increased productivity, and improved workplace culture.

Individuals with IDD are eager to work and thrive in many senior living jobs– including housekeeping, food service, social/recreational activity assistance, and more...



# Steps to Hosting a Coffee Talk



## 1. Connect with Your Local Chamber of Commerce

- Set up a meeting to introduce the Coffee Talk model. Share this guide as a resource.
- If there's a cost to partnering, ask the chamber to help secure a sponsor (see template on the next page).

## 2. Confirm Event Details

- Set a date and time. Reserve a room at the chamber.
- Decide whether the event will target a general employer audience or a specific industry.

## 3. Set Up Registration and Promotion

- Ask the chamber to create and manage the registration page (see example on the next page). Ask chamber to promote the event to their membership.
- Cross-advertise through your networks and community partners.

## 4. Recruit Speakers and Panelists

- Recruit a panel of employers who have successfully hired people with IDD or one guest speaker.
- Recruit a panel of self-advocates with IDD who are successfully employed.
- Identify someone from your organization to moderate the event and manage slides.

## 5. Prepare Panelists

- Email panel questions in advance to all speakers (see questions on the next page).
- Purchase thank-you gift cards for self-advocate panelists (recommended minimum: \$25).

## 6. Coordinate Coffee Service

- Arrange to have coffee available at the event (many chambers have a coffee brewer on site).

## 7. Follow Up

- Ask the chamber to send a follow-up email to all registrants (see template on next page).



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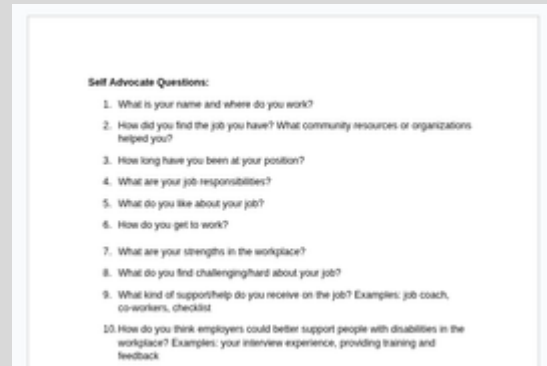
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# Coffee Talk Resources

## Slide Deck:



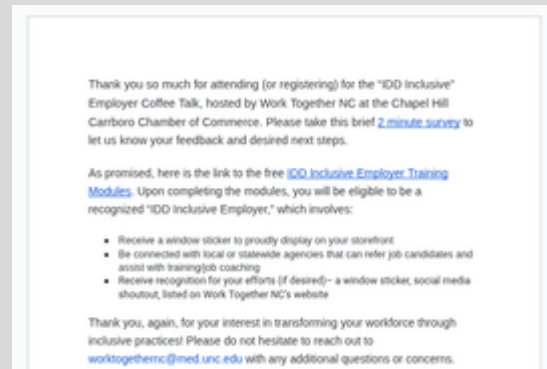
## Panelist Questions:



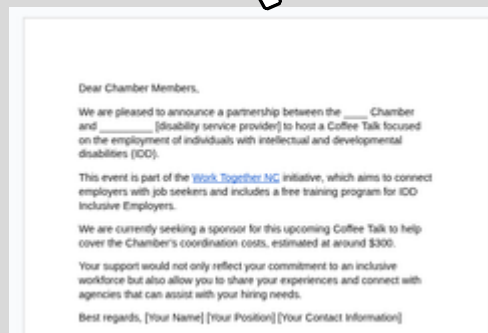
## Example Registration Page:



## Follow Up Email



## Request for a Sponsor Email



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# Model #2: Reverse Job Fairs



A Reverse Job Fair is an event where job seekers set up booths or tables to showcase their skills, portfolios, and experience, while employers walk around to network with them. We encourage you to consider hosting a Reverse Job Fair immediately following the Coffee Talk in an adjacent room—engaging employers while they are feeling motivated and inspired!

## Why Reverse Job Fairs Support Disability-Inclusive Hiring

Unlike traditional job fairs, this format allows candidates to utilize visual supports and tangible materials to communicate their skills more effectively. Additionally, it reduces the pressure of initiating conversations, which can be particularly beneficial for neurodivergent individuals. By integrating a Reverse Job Fair into your event, you create a more inclusive, engaging, and impactful hiring experience for both candidates and employers.



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# Steps to Hosting a Reverse Job Fair

## **1. Set the Date and Secure a Venue**

Choose an accessible location with space for 8–15 job seeker booths. Reserve it for at least 2–3 hours, plus setup and cleanup time.

## **2. Engage Supported Employment Providers**

Reach out to local Supported Employment agencies or your own organization's clients. Share a sign-up form and cap participation at around 8–15 job seekers for a balanced event.

## **3. Invite Employers**

Contact inclusive employers and local businesses. Explain the Reverse Job Fair format—job seekers host booths, and employers circulate. Ask them to RSVP via a registration page.

## **4. Prepare Job Seekers**

Offer 1–3 preparation workshops covering resume writing, networking, and booth setup. Encourage participants to create simple displays with resumes, work samples, photos, or portfolios.

## **5. Plan Layout and Logistics**

Create a floor plan with space between booths and clear pathways. Include signage for restrooms, entrances, and (if possible) a quiet room.

## **6. Send Employer Tip Sheet**

A few days before the event, send employers a tip sheet with an overview of the format, what to expect, and how to engage meaningfully with candidates.

## **7. Support Setup on Event Day**

Arrive early to assist with booth setup and welcome participants. Be available throughout the event to offer support and keep things running smoothly.

## **8. Follow Up**

Send thank-yous to job seekers and employers. Share a short feedback form and help facilitate any requested post-event connections.



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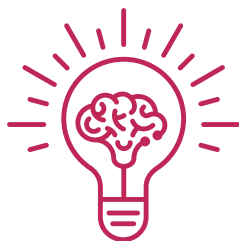
# Reverse Job Fair Tips for Employers

## Before the Event



### Keep an Open Mind

Focus on strengths and potential, not traditional resumes or interviews



### Think Creatively

Consider roles with task-based or routine duties that match different abilities



### Prepare Specific Questions

I.e, "Can you tell me about any work experience you've had and what you did?"  
Avoid Y/N questions unless you want a Y/N answer.

## During the Event

### Walk Around and Engage



Visit booths and learn from visual displays or presentations.

### Encourage and Listen



Give candidates time to share their interests and skills

### Be Inclusive of All Needs



Some may use communication devices or support persons. Rephrase questions for understanding if needed.

### Take Notes



Jot down names or strengths that stand out



# Reverse Job Fair Tips for Employers

## After the Event



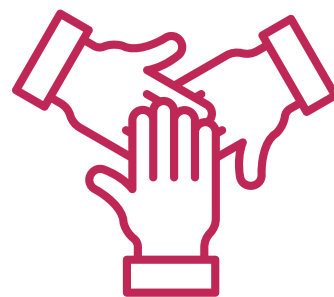
### Follow Up

Use the contact info provided to express interest



### Be Flexible

Consider customized or part-time roles based on strengths



### Stay Involved

Even if you're not hiring now, consider job shadows or internships.

## Why Hire Adults with I/DD?

**Loyal and Dependable Workers**



**Boost Team Morale and Diversity**

**Support from Job Coaches and Agencies Often Available**



**Inclusive hiring benefits the entire workforce!**



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# Becoming a Disability Inclusive Employer: Coffee Talk & Reverse Job Fair

***YOU'RE INVITED...***



To learn about and recruit an underutilized talent pool you may not have yet considered: people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## ***WHEN***

February 12

Coffee talk: 9-10am  
Job fair: 10-10:30am

Scan to Register:



Presented by...

## ***WHERE***

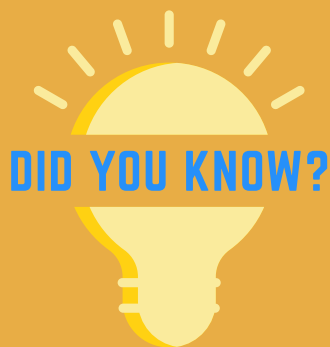
Chapel Hill  
Public Library  
(Room B)



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**The Chamber**  
*For a Greater Chapel Hill-Carrboro*



**DID YOU KNOW?**

Employers who hire people with IDD report lower turnover, increased productivity, and improved workplace culture.

Individuals with IDD are eager to work and thrive in many entry level jobs– including hospitality, food service, retail, human services, and more...



# Model #3: Disability Inclusive Holiday Markets



A **Disability Inclusive Holiday Market** is an event where disability-inclusive local employers and entrepreneurs are invited to set up vendor booths to sell their hand-crafted or small-batch products. This is a great way to bring visibility to disabled entrepreneurs and/or IDD Inclusive Employers. Holiday Markets can be hosted seasonally to align with gifting holidays, such as in early December (for winter holidays) and/or early May (for Mother's Day, graduation season, etc.).

## Why IDD-Inclusive Markets Support Disability-Inclusive Hiring

IDD-Inclusive Markets highlight the skills and contributions of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through entrepreneurship and meaningful employment. They offer the public a chance to interact with disabled vendors, challenging stereotypes and showcasing inclusive business models in action. These markets raise awareness, shift perceptions, and demonstrate that people with IDD are valuable members of the workforce and local economy.



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# Steps to Hosting a Holiday Market

1. **Secure a Free or Low-Cost Venue:** Identify an accessible event space such as a church hall, school gymnasium, or community center. The space should ideally provide folding tables and chairs. A 3–4 hour time block is recommended.
2. **Build a Contact List of Potential Vendors:** Include small businesses, social enterprises, or individual makers who are owned by people with disabilities or who employ people with disabilities in meaningful roles.
3. **Invite Vendors to Sign Up:** Share event details and a sign-up form with potential vendors. If support is needed with recruitment, reach out to local Supported Employment providers or disability-serving organizations to distribute the Call for Vendors through their networks.
4. **Cap Vendor Registration Once Full:** Limit the number of booths to 15–18 vendors for a manageable and engaging market experience.
5. **Promote Widely:** Advertise on local event calendars, Facebook groups, and community bulletin boards. Create a Facebook event and encourage vendors to share it within their own networks. Consider involving a local reporter or blogger to help cover the event.
6. **Communicate Logistical Details Early:** At least one month before the event, send vendors a detailed information packet, including: Table size and what's provided, Venue access, setup and breakdown times, Parking information, Accessibility notes
7. **Enhance Accessibility for Attendees:** Offer a designated quiet room/sensory space for attendees who may need a break from the crowd. Include clear signage for restrooms, entrances/exits, and the quiet room.

**Please feel welcome to utilize the resources and examples below:**

[Example Vendor Sign Up Form](#)



(Click to make a copy)



[Example Facebook Event](#)



# Conclusion

Building a disability inclusive workforce requires intentional partnerships, creative outreach, and a shared commitment to equity. The employer engagement models outlined in this guide—Coffee Talks, Reverse Job Fairs, and Disability Inclusive Markets—offer practical strategies for cultivating meaningful connections with businesses and expanding opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Whether you're just beginning to engage employers or looking to strengthen existing relationships, we hope these models spark new ideas and inspire collaboration. Disability-inclusive hiring doesn't just benefit individuals with IDD—it strengthens workplaces, communities, and the broader economy.

If you have questions, feedback, or would like help implementing these models in your community, please reach out to [worktogethernc@med.unc.edu](mailto:worktogethernc@med.unc.edu). Together, we can build a workforce that truly works for everyone.



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