



DISABILITY MENTORING DAY

Employers Guide

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and the State of Illinois are proud partners in Disability Mentoring and Career Development for the 21st Century. It is widely recognized that workers with disabilities have a strong, positive impact on the bottom line of the businesses who employ them. Mentoring opportunities are custom designed to assist employers and job seekers in finding the “perfect match” in employment. Illinois has made a strong commitment to making mentoring for disabled citizens a year-round effort to raise awareness, and promote training and hiring workers with disabilities as well as promote the economic well being of Illinois businesses and communities.

What are the Illinois goals for Disability Mentoring Day (DMD)?

- To promote disability as a central component of diversity recruitment to create a more inclusive workforce.
- To enhance internship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- To launch a year-round effort to foster mentoring/career exploration opportunities for people with disabilities.
- To increase confidence and career choices for students and job seekers with disabilities.
- To provide employers with the information and tools they need to make their work place both inviting and accessible to workers with disabilities.

What Happens on Disability Mentoring Day?

Disability Mentoring Day is officially commemorated on the third Wednesday of October and is implemented in locations throughout the United States and internationally throughout the year. It is designed to benefit from local creativity, with each community planning activities to best suit the interests and abilities of its students, job-seekers and local employers. Although the core experience is one-on-one job shadowing, event planners and employers may choose from a variety of events to meet the needs of the participants. Activities such as:

- a meeting for a group of students and job-seekers featuring several presentations;
- a reception where students, job-seekers and mentors can share their experiences;
- an employer panel;
- a tour of an employer work site.

All are examples of what some employers are doing. This list is by no means exhaustive, it is limited only by the creativity and constraints of the participants.

The type of mentoring experience provided will largely depend on the participants' interests, education levels, and work experiences. Job-seekers can focus on specific career advice and discuss potential internships and job openings. Employers can use the time to educate and recruit future workers. By providing mentees with the information and tools that will empower them to prepare for jobs the employer creates a bond that will encourage and lead excellent candidates to be prepared to enter targeted jobs within the company. Some examples of activities that may be provided include, but are not limited to:

- One-On-One Job Shadowing. Mentees are matched with a workplace mentor in their desired career field, enabling them to see what a typical day on the job is like and learn more about how to prepare for a job in that career.
- Job shadowing relationships can sometimes develop into lasting and rewarding mentoring relationships.
- Group Visits to Work sites. These informational tours let mentees see a variety of different jobs as they explore the work site from behind-the-scenes and meet employees on the job.
- Employer Panels where a small group of employers discuss their industry and their specific companies and jobs.
- Visits to work support groups or job seeker groups to discuss your company and jobs.
- Job Fairs that encourage information exchanges with mentors and mentees.
- Interview clinics or workshops to prepare job seekers for the type on interview to expect within this company or industry.

How Do Employers Benefit from DMD?

There are many rewards in being an employer mentor:

- Demonstrate positive leadership in your community
- Recruit short-term and long-term interns
- Gain access to a pool of new emerging talent
- Community service
- Public relations
- Access to qualified candidates
- Making a difference in someone's life
- Exposure to new ways of implementing reasonable accommodations
- Learn more about the experience of disability
- Promote job satisfaction with your current workforce
- Gain media exposure through coverage of the event
- Develop lasting relationships with disability community leaders

How Do Mentees Benefit?

DMD will give mentees the firsthand experience they need to:

- Explore possible career paths
- Demonstrate their skills to potential employers
- Develop lasting mentor relationships
- Gain greater confidence in their own employability
- Target career skills for improvement
- Understand the vital connection between school and work

The program's history shows that students' and job seekers' participation in Disability Mentoring Day can result in an internship opportunity with the host employer; function as a first interview on the way to a part-time or full-time employment offer; or even a firm on-the-spot job offer.

How Can Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) Assist Employers in Making Successful Career Matches and Accommodate Mentees with Disabilities?

What if I want to offer employment to one of my mentees? Or have the need to hire workers?

While the focus of DMD is career exploration and networking there are times when employers wish to extend a job offer to the mentees they have worked with. DRS can provide the following services for mentor/mentee situations and will gladly facilitate the hiring process when appropriate. Numerous state and federal financial assistance programs are available, Illinois DRS staff will gladly assist employers in accessing necessary services such as:

■ Job Analysis

This service can assist the business community in determining accommodations and accessibility solutions most appropriate for the work space and/or an employee with a disability. Staff members ask the employers a few easy questions about the worker, the job requirements and the work environment. The answers to these questions will help staff discover various practical solutions for a particular situation.

■ Workshops

Each year free workshops are offered to Illinois employers to address a wide variety of topics. These workshops assist in defining and clarifying concerns surrounding the hiring process, accessibility, and accommodations. DRS can customize training for your company based on your needs.

■ Consultation

On site consultation is provided to local businesses at no cost for issues regarding workers with disabilities or better serving customers with disabilities.

■ Pre screening qualified applicants

DRS prides itself on the fact that only qualified individuals are referred to an employer when job openings occur. Knowing the employer needs and matching that to the customers skills, abilities, interest, personality, educational background and qualifications helps to ensure that a good match will occur.

■ Job Coaching

If the employee is having difficulty meeting job task expectation a job coach might be utilized. A job coach is a DRS contractual employee with the primary duty of assisting the employee in learning new tasks and skills that will enable them to successfully perform essential job duties.

■ Assistive Technology

To determine what equipment may be needed to make a work situation accessible.

DRS services are free to employers, we will work with you to determine and meet your needs.

How Can I Make This Event Meaningful to the Mentees We Invite to Our Work Site?

- Provide a lunch or opportunity for the mentees to relax and be themselves and see your employees in a relaxed and comfortable setting
- Provide job descriptions and explain what the jobs entail as well as allowing them to see and try jobs (when appropriate)
- Provide lots of opportunity to ask questions
- Provide a list of questions that the mentee may not have considered
- Provide a new employee packet so that the mentee can get a full idea of what the work situation is really like
- Offer to do a practice interview with the mentee and provide feedback as to what they can do to impress an interviewer at a real interview
- Offer your card and a sincere invitation to contact you in the future for guidance in job preparation or job search
- Provide detailed information on how to apply for a job, as well as info on key hiring times and needs
- Consider offering an internship or other opportunities for the mentee to continue to learn about the job, company, and industry
- Ask the mentee questions about their concerns regarding returning to work or performing the job, allow them the opportunity to try different jobs and discuss what accommodations might enable them to do the job more easily or effectively
- Be fair and open, focus on the Ability!

Mentoring is all about learning, and it can and should be a 2 way street!

How Can Disability Mentoring Day Support Other Programs?

Disability Mentoring Day can be a point-of-entry for existing mentoring, school-to-work, internship and employment programs. Since many successful programs around the country require extensive year-round commitments, Disability Mentoring Day can be a way to attract new participants and then encourage them to become more involved year-round.

How Do Employers Get Involved?

Local Coordinators within Division of Rehabilitation Services will play a match-making role between students/job-seekers and local employers. These dedicated professionals are the key to Disability Mentoring Day. Persons wishing to participate in any capacity, as an employer, organization, educator, job-seeker or student, should contact their local Division of Rehabilitation office.

For more information contact your local DRS office, email bonnie.pinnow@illinois.gov, or contact the AAPD website at: <http://www.dmd-aapd.org/>