

Interacting with Businesses: Guiding Questions Protocol

Background

Businesses drive our economy. They provide jobs and supply the market with goods and services that consumers want and need. Businesses are always looking for ways to stay and remain competitive and a key component is having a skilled workforce – now and in the future. Workforce and partner organizations help businesses find and retain workers and build a talent pipeline. Also, they can assist with other aspects of the business, such as business strategy development within the community/region and aligning service delivery with other organizations that offer complementary services.

Now is the time for the workforce system and partner organizations to make meaningful connections and build strong relationships with business in a variety of capacities. Businesses rely on workforce and partner organizations to develop customized solutions through an integrated service delivery approach across all partners. Knowing how to build relationships with businesses can be a critical step for maintaining trust and ensuring continued business.



As you prepare to meet with businesses, this document can be used as a tool to help guide a meaningful discussion that will build long-term business relationships.

This document was developed as part of a [Disability and Employment Technical Assistance – Employer Engagement Cohort](#) which gathered agencies across the nation, representing workforce, education, vocational rehabilitative services, economic development, disability partners, and other alliances that serves businesses. It is meant to be shared with workforce and partner organizations within respective states serving mutual business customers, offering questions, responses, and resources that service organizations may consider when determining business needs, and is accompanied by two additional resources:

1. **Building Business Relationships: Introduction** – identifies promising practices and key elements, tips and questions to consider throughout the phases of a relationship lifecycle, from initiation to growth and maintenance, and eventually to developing a true partnership.

- 2. *Measuring the Success of Communications with Businesses*** – suggests ways to establish performance measurements that track how well your workforce and partner organizations build relationships and trust with businesses.

What is the Guiding Questions Protocol?

This protocol represents a list of “guiding questions” to help business services representatives become better acquainted with businesses and explore potential needs. These initial questions are paired with likely responses received from a business perspective and contain possible solutions and resources (websites or points of contact) that business services representative may provide. Suggestions and follow up questions are also provided to assist with responses to statements that may appear close-ended.

The protocol lists national, state, and local resources that could be of help to businesses. The developers of this tool focused heavily on providing web links to national resources. They also provided possible examples of state or local resources to help demonstrate the types of resources that could be listed. Workforce and partner organizations are encouraged to add resources that are state and/or local-specific.

This tool is NOT meant to be a rigid structure and should not be viewed as an exact map of the conversation flow. Every interaction with business is unique and, therefore, must be customized. The goal is for interactions to be nimble, inquisitive, and of value to the business.

Who should use this protocol?

The protocol was developed for organizations that work with and share common business customers, and was designed with workforce, education, vocational rehabilitative services, human services, economic development, disability partners, business alliances, and local workforce development boards in mind. These agencies are defined as workforce and partner organizations.

How your workforce and partner organizations can use this protocol.

This tool is intended to be used across agencies within your state to create a more integrated and streamlined service delivery and customer experience. To gain the most value from this tool, some customization will be required to ensure the inclusion of national, state, and local resources within the resource pipelines. You may also customize the questions and responses that are most appropriate for your state and partner organizations. Capturing listed items that are most relevant to businesses in your communities will be time well spent.

What is a Resource Pipeline?

A resource pipeline is a cluster of related national, state, and local resources, based on one topic. There are six main clusters identified throughout this document, which can be found in the Appendix section.

- ◆ Pipeline A: Recruitment & Hiring Resources
- ◆ Pipeline B: Return on Investment (Incentives) Resources
- ◆ Pipeline C: Accommodations & Accessibility Resources
- ◆ Pipeline D: Education & Training Resources
- ◆ Pipeline E: Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming
- ◆ Pipeline F: Internal Tools & Resources for Employment and Business Services Professionals and other Stakeholders

Three Main Questions

This protocol includes three main questions to ask a business to help organize information around business needs. You will notice that some resources overlay responses to other questions.

1. What, if any, challenges do you have attracting and finding qualified candidates that meet your business needs?
2. How has your business' culture and/or investment in your workers contributed to your success in hiring and retaining a good workforce?
3. Have you ever worked with any organizations (American Job Centers (AJC), colleges, schools, vocational rehabilitation, etc.) or other service providers to help you with your staffing needs?

Each main question is followed with scenarios that depict possible business responses and next steps that you can take to continue the interaction and meet business' needs.

Guiding Question #1:

What, if any challenges do you have in attracting and finding qualified candidates that meet your business needs?

Scenario 1 of 4:

↓ **Business Response:** No challenges (stable workforce).

Action: Need to keep dialogue going through follow up questions, especially in response to any statements by the business that there are no challenges. It is best to explore how they handle situations to determine if there might be more effective ways and resources to support their efforts

↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** When you are hiring, how do you find (qualified) workers?

- **Business Response:** Examples of approaches

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))

↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** Are there specific times of the year when your hiring needs increase significantly?

- **Business Response:** Not really (sporadic hiring, constant hiring, no patterns).

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Return on Investment (Incentives) Resources ([Pipeline B](#))

Other State and Local Recommendations to Include:

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** What do you look for in your employees? Describe a good employee for your business.
- ↓ **Business Response:** (Range of answers from...independent, hard-working, professionals who can multi-task, to...technically skilled workers who know ____, People who can handle working in ____, types of environments, etc.)

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** Areas for growth: Are there areas that you are hoping to grow your business? Services or products you wish you could provide?

 - **Business Response 1:** Yes! We want to expand into other...

Action: Share resources:

- **Business Response 2:** We'd like to start providing the following services or products: _____. We need to find the talent to support that type of expansion.

Action: Share resources:

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Return on Investment (Incentives) Resources ([Pipeline B](#))

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** What type of person do you see helping your business with this endeavor? What kind of skills would you be looking for in applicants? Do you have concerns about finding people with such skills?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

Scenario 2 of 4:

↓ ***Business Response:*** We have a hard time finding talent to fill ____ position(s).

↓ ***Organization Follow Up:*** Explore...

- ◆ Specific areas of need (types of tasks/roles).
- ◆ Skills needed in applicants (any required credentials, years of experience, technical skills).
- ◆ How the business typically looks for applicants and how they recruited their best hires.

Action: Be a connector. Suggest connecting business with resources and specific contacts, when applicable. Walk them through the tool and how to find the specific information you would like them to access.

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

↓ ***Organization Follow Up:*** What skills do you consider to be critical vs. desirable for job applicants? What are the qualities and skills of your “star-performing” employees?

Scenario 3 of 4:

↓ ***Business Response:*** Speaks about specific skills or personality traits.

↓ ***Organization Follow Up:*** Have you observed any skills you feel most candidates are lacking?

↓ ***Organization Follow Up:*** Have you ever considered a partnership with another organization or school to help you identify a better pool of candidates?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))
- ◆ Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming ([Pipeline E](#))
- ◆ Internal Tools and Resources for Employment Professionals and other Stakeholders ([Pipeline F](#))

Scenario 4 of 4:

- ↓ **Business Response:** Yes, we are constantly looking for qualified employees.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up:** Is the challenge finding qualified workers or that you need a lot of them?
- ↓ **Business Response:** Business gives any of a variety of causes: mix in the quality of applicants; high turn-over rate; aging workforce; seasonal needs; lack of necessary skills; a lot of competition hiring/possibly better benefits elsewhere; etc.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up:** How do you usually recruit for your positions?
- ↓ **Business Response:** Explains typical postings used for advertising open positions.

Action: Give examples of resources to address concerns. Business Service Teams for guidance on writing job descriptions or ads, free job listing opportunities, job fairs or reverse job fairs, etc. Help them connect to options.

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up:** With the youth workforce more present in businesses, have you had to make changes in your practices to attract and retain this group?
- ↓ **Business Response:** Not interested in young workforce (May want more experience, concern over retention or other reasons.)

Action: Explain how large a part of the workforce youth represents (90+ million strong) and that if the business wanted to explore this group they could partner with schools, community and 4-year colleges, youth programs, and other training programs including those offering soft skills training, and other types of work to prepare for jobs.

Action: Provide other examples of resources available to address concerns for non-youth population.

- ↓ **Organization Possible Follow Up:** Does any of the information about workforce programs just described make you interested in exploring more of a working relationship with an organization who specializes in helping businesses meet their hiring needs – such as mine or others in the state or local community?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming ([Pipeline E](#))
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- ↓ **Organization Follow Up: For a business with managers/levels:** Do you have challenges with any middle-level knowledge or skills in current employees or job applicants?

- ↓ **Business Response:** Yes. (May say it's is hard to find employees who can grow/advance, willing to manage/supervise, have people management skills, etc.)

Action: Share resources for finding talent in the following resource pipelines.

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up:** What, if any, outside resources have you utilized to identify, educate and train your workforce (new or existing)?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Return on Investment (Incentives) Resources ([Pipeline B](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

Guiding Question #2:

How has your business' culture and/or investment in your workers contributed to your success in hiring and retaining a good workforce?

Scenario 1 of 5:

- ↓ **Business Response:** We have _____ work culture, benefits, training efforts, other aspects of the business to try to create a stable work setting and minimize turnover.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question 1:** How would you describe any diversity in your population of employees? Would you say you have a mix of workers? (Male/female, age range, racial or ethnic groups, people with disabilities, etc.)
- ↓ **Business Response:** We have a mix, or we don't have a mix.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** Is this an area of interest? Are you interested in further diversifying your workforce?

Action: Introduce concepts - a range of people means a range of ideas/approaches, which can help a company keep growing and diversify their products/services/approaches to business while attracting a larger/wider range of customers, thus providing longer-term stability of the company.

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Accommodations and Accessibility Resources ([Pipeline C](#))
- ◆ Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming ([Pipeline E](#))
- ◆ Internal Tools and Resources for Employment Professionals and other Stakeholders ([Pipeline F](#))

- ↓ ***Organization Follow Up Question:*** What, if any, things would you like to do better to create a culture that hires and retains a broader range of employees? Is there anything your organization would need help with in order to do this?
- ↓ ***Business Response:*** Not sure what we can do or not sure how to improve.

Scenario 2 of 5:

- ↓ ***Organization Follow Up Question:*** Can you talk about any circumstances in which you made any allowances or adjustments for the benefit of a worker?
- ↓ ***Business Response 1:*** Yes! We've had workers having a child and needing a more flexible work schedule (returning from surgery or injury needing a lighter work load/light duty).
 - ***Organization Response:*** Great! Sounds like you really strive to retain your productive workforce.
- ↓ ***Business Response 2:*** No. (None that I can think of.)

Action: Give possible examples: Flex time for a worker with family (child care, health issue of family member, aging family members), injury impacting return to work capacity, etc.

Scenario 3 of 5:

- ↓ ***Organization Follow Up Question:*** Have you ever employed individuals with disabilities and what, if any, adjustments did you make to their role, the workplace, supervision, etc.?

- ↓ **Business Response 1:** Yes (gives examples of modifications made to work, setting, schedule, or other).
- **Organization Response:** Great! It sounds like you have some good experiences and good instincts.
- Action Item:** Move to next question – working with an organization to help in these situations or with hiring.
- ↓ **Business response 2:** Not really. We don't believe we ever had employees with disabilities and/or if they did, they did not require any special modifications.
- Action:** Introduce resources such as Job Accommodation Network (JAN), etc. and move to the next question – working with other organizations.

Scenario 4 of 5:

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** Would it help to know that there are organizations that can help a business attract, hire and retain highly qualified employees with disabilities? This organization could advise and support the business around issues regarding the potential need for an accommodation.
- ↓ **Business Response 1:** I am not really aware of such organizations.
- Action:** Follow up thoughts – these organizations can also offer guidance if you have questions about other business issues beyond hiring/training/retaining employees (ADA compliance, websites that are more accessible, Universal Design strategies) that can help many employees, not just workers, with accommodation needs.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** Is your business a federal contractor? Does your business have to meet the Office of Federal Contracting and Compliance Program (OFCCP) goals/diversity action plan around recruiting and hiring persons with disabilities?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Accommodations and Accessibility Resources ([Pipeline C](#))

Scenario 5 of 5:

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** What, if any, questions or concerns might you have if the best applicant were a person with a disability?
- ↓ **Business Response:** None (have experience)
 - **Organization Follow Up Question:** How do you train your leadership team, supervisor or manager to work with or support having a person with a disability on staff?
 - **Organization Follow Up Question:** Would it be helpful to have assistance in training your team about having a co-worker or staff member with a disability?

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Accommodations and Accessibility Resources ([Pipeline C](#))
- ◆ Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming ([Pipeline E](#))

Guiding Question #3:

Have you ever worked with any organizations (AJCs, colleges, schools, vocational rehabilitation, etc.) or other employment providers to help you with your staffing needs?

Scenario 1 of 3:

- ↓ **Business Response:** Yes. It worked well.
- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** What worked well and less well in that situation? Would you do it again?

Scenario 2 of 3:

- ↓ **Business Response:** Yes, but it did not work well. (Bad match, no one available or interested in our jobs, etc.)

Action: Acknowledge issues stated. Express interest in changing that to a more positive experience by connecting business with resources that match the business needs (specific skill training or credentials, better matching of applicants to business culture, etc.).

Scenario 3 of 3:

- ↓ **Business Response:** No, we have not worked with any.

Action: Provide examples that would be relevant to the businesses needs.

- ↓ **Organization Follow Up Question:** How can we and other organizations help prepare a job applicant to meet your hiring needs?

- ↓ **Business Response:** I can't really think of anything.

Action: Introduce programs and resources in the area to help with hiring.

Follow the Resource Pipeline:

- ◆ Recruitment and Hiring Resources ([Pipeline A](#))
- ◆ Education/Training Resources ([Pipeline D](#))

Appendix: Resource Pipeline Clusters

The information below lists the resource pipeline clusters and relevant national resources links. Currently, there are no state and local resource links, however, the developers of this tool included a list of possible resources that can be customized to your state and local areas. The resource pipeline clusters capture tools and resources across agencies and should be tailored to a direct link within a website. It is important to realize that most businesses are unaccustomed to navigating workforce and partner organizations websites. Therefore, it is helpful to walk businesses through or demonstrate parts of websites, so businesses get directly to the section that solves the challenges they face.

Pipeline A: Recruitment & Hiring Resources

National

- ◆ [CareerOneStop](#)
- ◆ [Competency Model Clearinghouse](#)
- ◆ [O*NET Online](#)
- ◆ [Recruitment and Hiring information from EARN](#)
- ◆ [Workforce Recruitment Program](#)
- ◆ [Hiring Veterans Program](#)
- ◆ [Helmets to Hardhats Hiring Skilled Veterans Employer Page](#)
- ◆ [VR National Employment Team \(NET\)](#)
- ◆ [Talent Acquisition Portal \(TAP\)](#)

State and Local

- ◆ State and local One Stop Career Center Information and Contacts
- ◆ State and local Vocational Rehabilitation Business Service Contacts
- ◆ Veterans Hiring Programs
- ◆ Local Resources on Talent Pools

Pipeline B: Return on Investment (Incentives) Resources

National

- ◆ [Employer Assistance and Resources Network \(EARN\): Employer Financial Incentives](#)
- ◆ [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\): Tax Incentives Topics](#)
- ◆ [Federal Bonding Program](#)
- ◆ [Office of Federal Contracting and Compliance Program \(OFCCP\)](#)

State and Local

- ◆ State Tax Incentives
- ◆ State Initiatives and Hiring Programs
- ◆ On-the-Job Training Opportunities

Pipeline C: Accommodations & Accessibility Resources

National

- ◆ [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#)
- ◆ [ADA National Network](#)
- ◆ [Partnership on Employment and Accessible Technology \(PEAT\)](#)
- ◆ [Employer Assistance and Resource Network \(EARN\)](#)
- ◆ [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#): Reasonable Accommodations.
- ◆ [US Department of Labor Job Accommodations page](#)
- ◆ [Office of Disability and Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#): Accommodations Page
- ◆ [Office of Federal Contracting and Compliance Program \(OFCCP\)](#)

State and Local

- ◆ Independent Living Centers
- ◆ Regional ADA Centers
- ◆ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissions

Pipeline D: Education & Training Resources

National

- ◆ [Registered Apprenticeship](#)
- ◆ [Career One Stop's Train and Retain Page](#)

State and Local

- ◆ Workforce Training Programs
- ◆ Community College with skills training or certifications
- ◆ Vocational/Technical schools with skills training
- ◆ Work-based learning and alternative training resources
- ◆ Vocational Rehabilitation: On-the-Job Training Opportunities
- ◆ American Job Center: On-the-Job Training Opportunities

Pipeline E: Tools for Businesses to Create Disability Inclusion Programming

National

- ◆ [Disability: IN National Website](#): Business-to-business network dedicated to increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities
- ◆ [Workplace Initiative](#): Comprehensive guide created for businesses who are hiring and retaining qualified persons with disabilities. This guide builds the business case for hiring people with disabilities and gives guidance with real-world examples on implementation.
- ◆ [Ask EARN Inclusion at Work Trainings](#): Trainings provided by the Employer Assistance and Resource Network to help businesses create a more inclusive workforce.

State and Local

- ◆ State and local Disability Employment Toolkits
- ◆ State and local Disability: IN chapters
- ◆ Employment First Websites
- ◆ Local disability inclusion initiatives

Pipeline F: Internal Tools & Resources for Employment & Business Service Professionals and other Stakeholders

National

- ◆ [Lead Center Employer Engagement Resources](#)
- ◆ [Explore VR Business Engagement Page](#)
- ◆ [Ask EARN Service Provider Resources](#)
- ◆ [Workplace Initiative: Building Business Case Guide](#)

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