- [Diane] Hi, this is Diane Hernandez and I'm here to talk to you guys today about the reverse job fair concept. The reverse job fair is a very interesting idea that we've had a lot of success with here in region 11, the central Iowa area, and it's where we really turn the tables on the traditional career fair concept.

In a traditional career fair, the businesses are going to come and they're going to have their big presentation board things and they're going to have their swag and maybe some candy out on their table. And then, the job candidates are going to walk around and walk up to that table and learn more about that business and what kind of positions they have to offer. In a reverse job fair, it's the job candidate that has the table. They have the presentation materials. They have the items on their, the tactile stuff on their table that somebody can touch. They have information about themselves. They have a display about themselves and a presentation to give these employers so when the employers walk up they can talk about their skills and attributes to the employer, and the employer can learn more about them.

I'm going to say this several times in this presentation 'cause it's really dear to my heart, a reverse job fair, while that's the initial concept is that you have this event where the participants have a table, the real idea is that this is a process, it's not an event, it's a process. In this process these job candidates learn more about themselves, they learn more about their skills and abilities, and they are better able, not only to perform well at the reverse job fair, but in their general job seeking activities. The benefits to doing this sort of backwards idea is that the job seeker develops a high-quality portfolio to share, including their resume, their elevator speech, how they're going to dress, and they practice developing that presentation. They know that they're going to have to present this in a specific way and that builds so much confidence in these folks. They're also working with a team of people that really help them develop what that presentation is going to look like.

For the employers, it connects them with high-quality but overlooked job seekers, and it requires less financial and logistic burden on them. They don't have to bring their display. They don't have to set anything up. And they come in and they just talk to the people that they're interested in talking to who are interested in being in their career sector. And it gives a chance for them to see the job seeker's strength in a way that promotes creative thinking, so they're going to come in and learn about their strengths, and maybe they're not going to try to fit, maybe it's not going to be a situation where they have a circular hole and they're trying to figure out where that circular peg is. Maybe they're going to be able to say, this person has some really strong skills that they're going to be able to bring to our job. And so, we're going to figure out a way to make that work.

The first step in having a reverse job fair is to create a strong team. The team is very, very important for a number of reasons. One, it really brings together all of your partners into one activity that really brings cohesion. Also, when you're doing a reverse job fair, what I love about it is that because we all work together I get to know the job candidates from all the other sectors, or from all the other agencies. So then, if I find out about an opportunity that might fit one of these job seekers that took place in our reverse job fair, even though that's not, that person's not on my caseload, I can connect them to the business that I have a connection with. It also allows a lot of input from a lot of different agencies, so the person gets a really well-rounded approach to their job search process.

The second step in this, getting ready for the reverse job fair, is to establish a plan. That plan needs to include a work-readiness workshop, which is a clinic with stations for people to help build their job-seeking skills. Then we usually give about two weeks between that work-readiness workshop and the rehearsal. During that time, there's going to be preparation with one-on-one working with that counselor or employment specialist. Then we're going to do a rehearsal. And then, we're going to do the actual reverse job fair.

Each one of these steps is very important because, again, this is a process, not an event. The first thing we're going to do, pardon, the third thing we're going to do, is identify your job candidates. We had agencies, said that agencies could bring five events. We're recently doing an event where I think, basically, people are bringing like two, it kind of depends on the size of your venue.

The main thing is that you only want to bring as many candidates as you can support, but around 15 to 20 candidates is right around the right amount. You want to have as many, you want to make sure that each one of the candidates that's at that job fair is really well supported and has had the opportunity to build a really strong presentation. It's also helpful to have a lot of different job sectors. It's helpful to have a lot of different abilities and skill levels represented so that when the employers come in, it's pretty much everybody can find something that's going to work for them. We usually have no criteria other than that they're willing and able to put in the work that's needed to be successful. And then, we have them complete an application and release of information. This is so that we have a tracking mechanism, primarily, and also a release for any media that might come, a release so that we can all talk to each other, as far as the agencies, that we can share information. And then, review those expectations with the candidate.

Step four is that you're going to identify the employers. Once you know who the candidates are, you're going to try to make sure that you have employers that match that candidate. We've started doing something recently here where we've been combining reverse job fairs with actual career fairs, so there'll be a room where the career fair is going on, and there'll be a room where the reverse job fair is going on, and then we can, agency staff can move in between those two rooms making sure that the businesses know about the candidates, and then, the candidates can also go across and visit with them at their booth. We found that incredibly successful, although, you can also have a stand-alone reverse job fair where you invite the businesses. Even when we do it in conjunction with a actual career fair, we also reach out specifically to businesses that might have an interest in one of the candidates that we're going to have at the reverse job fair and invite them just even to just come to the reverse job fair even if it's in connection with a career fair where they could have a booth. Get a booth, that's awesome if you do that, but also, if you just need to just come and talk to our job candidates, that's perfect, too.

Step five. This is my favorite day, which is the work-readiness workshop. So, in this we set up a room and we have, we go across the room and we have stations. So, we'll have a station for the look, so we're saying, okay, like, this is the dress for success and talking about hygiene and grooming. We'll have another table that's about interviewing, so a lot of times, this is a good place where you can bring in your business partners and have them actually perform the mock interviews on the candidates. We'll have a resume and application table. Also, a 30-second elevator speech. And then, a display, talking about what that display is going to be. Now, in the pictures that you saw, we have used tri-fold boards. The thing that I like about it, it does take on a little bit of a science fair sort of look to it, but the reason why the tri-fold boards work well is because they're so high. And so, what you want is for a business to be able to stand on one end of the room and be able to look across the room and see what candidates they might be interested in. So, you want that kind of, however you go about doing it, making sure that that visual is big enough and bright enough and tall enough, literally, so that they can see and know which candidates they want to go talk to. We also have people who've done really interesting things with their displays. We've had, there was a guy who was really good with robots kind of things, he had this little like Star Wars thing and he would go and knock it against people, and then they'd come over and talk to him. There was a gal who was interested in warehousing and she literally had a little miniature warehouse with all the VIN numbers on it, it was really cool. We had people who, we had a gal who was interested in working in a hotel who literally stood and folded towels while she was talking to the people in the, with the various businesses.

So, it's an opportunity to be creative and really showcase what your talents and abilities are. After we've done that event where people go through and sort of learn all the different elements of the reverse job fair, we usually give about two weeks for one-on-one coaching. During that time the person's going to work one-on-one with their agency or their employment specialist and really figure out how to build the display that's best for them, really work on that elevator speech, refine the resume, look at the businesses that are going to be there. And then, we have the mock job fair, or the rehearsal. This is going to look just exactly like the actual reverse job fair, so you're going to have a good flow for the tables and you're going to have handouts explaining the concept to the pretend employers that are going to be at your rehearsal. This is a chance to think through everything like the parking and the signage and the walking and really think about what is this going to look like.

Now, as far as, I also have a thing about there about color tablecloths and I'll get to it in a minute, that's an important part of the concept. This is that. One thing that we have done is that we will assign each one of the job candidates to a career pathway sector. And then, we will assign a color to that sector. We'll give them a tablecloth that represents that color. When the employer comes in, if they're interested in labor, they'll know that the people who are at the green tables are looking for office clerical work, and the people who are looking at the blue tables are interested in labor or warehouse work. So, they're going to be able to walk in, go to all the blue tables, meet with the people that they need to meet with, and know that they're not spending time talking to somebody who's not at all interested in going to work in the sector that they offer. This is one of the things that the businesses have really said is one of their favorite parts about the career fair is it just organizes them when they come in.

Lastly, we've got the actual reverse job fair. You had a chance to do the mock, so you were able to think through are people able to find the room, do we have the proper signage? You're able to really refine those elevator speeches with your job seekers. Really talk about those presentations, come up with great ideas for displaying their talents. We have a guy that's going to be at the next reverse job fair that we're actually holding this week who mostly did childcare, wants to get into labor, but he plays beep baseball, so it's baseball for people who are blind or visually impaired and the ball actually makes noise and they hit it. He's been in the world series of beep ball. And so, he's bringing that stuff to show, and we've got this whole presentation on how he shows up, suits up, and gives it all for the things that he does and how now he's ready to bring that into the workforce. There's all kinds of creative things that you can do with this. Again, we've gotten great feedback.

You do want to have satisfaction surveys. I will say that the businesses and the job candidates who have participated in this process have provided great feedback for us and think it's an awesome idea. Make sure you follow up. Follow up with those employers. Follow up with the job candidates. Make sure that they're reaching out. And just try to continue with those connections making sure that nothing falls through the cracks after the event. We usually do like a little round table with folks after the reverse job fair rehearsal and after the actual reverse job fair to get feedback from the job candidates on ways that we can improve or what their thoughts were.

That's what we've got. If you've got any questions, feel free to reach out to me at any time to answer those questions. Thanks so much.