

ONE  **ALLIANCE FOR FULL PARTICIPATION**
REAL JOBS—IT'S EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

PERSON

AT A TIME

Changing the way Missourians look at individuals with disabilities
ONE LEGISLATOR, ONE JOB, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

TAKE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO WORK
OCTOBER 2012

PARTICIPANT'S
GUIDE

MISSOURI'S TAKE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO WORK DAY

"ONE PERSON AT A TIME"

We Need Your Help!

October is **National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)**, a national campaign to raise awareness about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of American workers with disabilities.

Thank you for having the courage to speak up about the importance of this cause by inviting your legislator to visit you at work. During the visit, you are representing individuals with disabilities who have the desire to work in the community and earn a competitive wage. You will show your legislator that working in **community-based employment** is important to every individual. Everyone deserves the opportunity to **earn a competitive salary** so that they can be an active participant in this state's economy.

We know that adults with disabilities do have and maintain meaningful jobs throughout our state. We want everyone to see that individuals with disabilities can and want to work. Their participation in the workforce adds incredible value and brings innovative ideas to the Missouri workforce. **It's time to shine the spotlight on how your skills and talents contribute to Missouri's economic vitality.**

We want legislators to know that individualized, integrated community employment is an important goal for our state. Many of the legislators have little experience in this area, which makes it difficult for them to understand what can be possible. Through this visit, you can educate your legislator and maybe even influence how he feels about this issue.

Thank you for your participation!

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Organizing a “Take Your Legislator to Work” event is a powerful tool to give your state legislator and/or candidate an up-close look at the contributions you make to the state economy, your community, and the business where you work. Your outreach will be the first step in building an on-going relationship with the legislators and their staff, and will strengthen the overall advocacy efforts.

GETTING STARTED

Planning your own “Take Your Legislator to Work” event can be stress-free by working closely with your facilitator and the other members of your committee. Suggested members include your employer, job coach, and representatives of any other agencies you work with. Having a solid support team to help reinforce your message during both the planning process and the visit will really help you make a lasting impact on the legislator and/or candidate during this campaign.

As you start to plan your visit, it is important to think about the impact that having a job has had on your life and how you have positively contributed to your community, through volunteering, donating to local causes, and even how much you paid in taxes last year. All of these things are important reasons why integrated community employment is a good thing for individuals with disabilities in our state.

SOME OTHER THINGS TO ASK YOURSELF:

Can I talk about my job in a truly positive manner?

How does having a job impact my life?

What steps did I take to get a job?

Who has helped me along the way?

What community supports have made it easier for me to get a job and keep it?

What barriers did I meet during the process of finding a job?

What did I do to overcome them?

When is the best time for a visit?

8 WEEKS PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- Make sure the leadership at your place of employment is open to hosting a legislator. Consider *scheduling a meeting with the owner/manager to discuss the goals of the activity and outline the positive impact it will have for the business.*
- **Submit invitations to state legislators and/or candidates to request a meeting.** (A sample invitation letter is included in this guide.)
- **Follow up with a phone call within five business days of sending the initial invitation.** *Don't forget to mention the letter and re-invite the legislator and staff.*
- Try to invite the other people in your life who have helped you be successful in community employment. Remember to include your employer in the conversation. His or her perspective will be important to the legislator.
- Draft a document indicating your **“take away message”** and identify what key issues you would like to discuss. This document can be used to brief all of the participants before the event.
- Draft an itinerary for the visit. A sample itinerary is available for you in this guide.

CHECKLIST:

- Participant Info Sheet** completed and sent
- Ask your employer for permission** to invite your legislator. Once your employer has agreed to the visit, then you can start planning
- Make a list of who else to invite:** *your employer, your job coach, other co-workers, the local newspaper or TV station*
- Write your invitation letter to your legislator and/or candidate**
- Work on an itinerary for the day**

2 WEEKS PRIOR TO THE EVENT

- By now, the event date and time should be confirmed. It is important to provide the legislator's district office with the proposed itinerary for the day's events.
- Put together an informational packet with background information and handouts for the legislator to take back with them.
- Plan to meet with all of the participants a few days before the event to discuss the itinerary and the main "take away message." Practice discussing key issues with each other before meeting with the legislator. This will allow your group to have a common voice and a greater impact on the legislator and their staff.

CHECKLIST:

- Date for Legislator Visit has been **set**
- Itinerary for day of visit has been **created**
- Itinerary has been **submitted to the legislator's district office**
- Informational Packet** has been created for the legislator
- Your group has **practiced** talking about the key "take away message" and each person has notes prepared for what they plan to say
- Press Release has been sent to local media agencies

TAKE YOUR LEGISLATOR TO WORK DAY

1. The tour should last approximately **30-45 minutes**. Be sure to include samples of all areas where employees with disabilities participate.
2. When meeting with your legislator and/or candidate face-to-face, introduce yourself and be prepared to speak clearly about your job. Show them that you are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about your work.
3. Point their attention to the prepared informational packet. This will be a useful and meaningful tool in your discussion.
4. If you haven't heard back from the local media, make another attempt to let them know about the visit in the days leading up to the event.
5. If the local media is unable to make it to your visit, make sure you have someone take plenty of pictures. These will be valuable later in continuing the conversation even after the visit has ended.

CHECKLIST:

- Every participant who plans on speaking has practiced what they want to say
- Every participant has created notes for what they want to say and has them the day of
- At least one person in the group has a camera on hand to take pictures
- Last minute attempts to contact the local media have been made
- Informational Packet** for the legislator has been **printed** and is ready to hand out

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE EVENT

1. Send a follow-up “thank you” letter immediately after the event thanking the legislator and staff for their time. (A sample letter is included in this guide) The “thank you” letter will accomplish three things:
 - It allows you to express your gratitude for his or her time spent with you
 - It will remind the legislator of the visit and its purpose
 - It will allow you to keep the channels of communication open.You should include your contact information with your note so that he or she knows how to reach you if they have any follow-up questions.
2. Include any photos from the event.
3. Send a “thank you” note to all of the attendees for participating in the event. It is especially important to remember to thank your employer.
 - Include any photos from the event.
4. Please also send any photos or links to news articles written about the event to lsensintaffar@woodhaventeam.org. We would love to share your stories of success with the rest of the participants throughout the state.

CHECKLIST:

- “Thank you” note and photos have been sent to Legislator & staff
- “Thank you” note and photos have been sent to all attendees
- Photos & links to news articles about the event have been sent to AFP

Thank you!

*The **Alliance for Full Participation** and its partners thank you for playing such a important part in this project. Thank you for finding the time in your busy life to schedule a visit with your legislator. Thank you for having the courage to speak up about what is important to you.*

We firmly believe that every person deserves the same opportunity to find meaningful employment in the community regardless of his or her abilities. Your participation will help us showcase what adults with disabilities are capable of. Thank you for your hard work in planning this event, for the time you will spend with your legislator, and the story you will share with him or her. Together we will show the state what you are capable of.

SETTING THE DATE WORKSHEET

Because 2012 is an election year and some of the currently seated legislators are term-limited, they may not be seeking re-election. If your current legislator is not running for re-election, you may want to consider asking one or more of the candidates running to fill the empty seat. You can find information about who your legislator is, or who the candidates are for your district at the Secretary of State's website: <http://www.sos.mo.gov/>.

Once you've identified whom you will be contacting, make sure you send your letter of invitation well enough in advance to give them time to make arrangements. If you are inviting a current legislator, make sure you send your letter to their office at the state capitol, and to their home district. If you are contacting a candidate, use the contact information from the Secretary of State's website listed above.

Use the letter to begin the conversation about a month or so before you want the visit to happen. Wait about five business days after you've sent the letter to follow up with your legislator and/or candidate. This will give him or her plenty of time to consider your request.

Plan A:

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Who will be invited: _____

Plan B:

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Who will be invited: _____

Plan C:

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Who will be invited: _____

Plan D:

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Who will be invited: _____

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER

DATE

Your Name
Business Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Legislator's Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear *(Legislator Name)*,

State purpose for the letter and give specific date(s) for the tour.

I would like to invite you and your staff to participate in a tour of *(name of business)* during October, to celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

A tour of *(business)* would highlight for you the ways that I and other workers with disabilities make contributions every day to improve this business' bottom line in *(City)*.

Identify yourself as a constituent.

To celebrate National Disability Employment Awareness Month, I am asking you to visit my workplace in October to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Missouri workers with disabilities. My regular working times are _____.

Job creation is a priority for our state and this would be a wonderful opportunity to showcase the skills and talents of workers with disabilities in Missouri.

Give a background on your role at your workplace. Describe the specific things you do to contribute.

During this tour, I would welcome the opportunity to begin an ongoing dialogue with your office about the importance of community-based, competitive employment and other issues that workers with disabilities face. I will follow up with your office to discuss the details of arranging a tour.

Offer to serve as a resource on employment issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Title,
Business name

MAKING THE CALL WORKSHEET

When you call to follow up with your legislator and/or candidate, have several times and dates ready to suggest. By giving the legislator a choice, he or she can pick the best option rather than immediately telling you “no” if a specific time doesn’t work. Unless your legislator is completely swamped, try not to take “no” for an answer. Emphasize that it is important to you to schedule the visit during October, but let them know that if October absolutely doesn’t work for them, you are open to scheduling a different date. Remember to be flexible and courteous. Choose a day that is usually quiet so that you can have more time to talk to the legislator while he or she is there.

Take notes on what you want to say before you call, so you don't forget any details.

EXAMPLE OF WHAT TO SAY: *(if you have to leave a message)*

Hello, my name is _____. I live in _____ *(name of your city)* which is a part of your district. I work at _____ *(place of employment)*. In honor of October being National Disability Employment Awareness Month, I would like to invite you to visit me at work. Having a job is an important part of my life and I want to share my story with you. You can reach me at _____ *(phone number)*. Thank you for your time.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS:

HAVE THIS INFORMATION READY AS WELL:

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Employer's Name: _____

Work Address: _____

VISIT HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

Who will be invited: _____

SAMPLE ITINERARY

Introductions

Introduce yourself to the legislator when he or she first arrives. Then introduce them to the rest of the group, if any. Some important people to remember: your employer, job coach and co-workers.

Tour

Give them a tour of the entire facility, even if your job is only in a certain part of the building. It's important that they get a good idea of where you work.

Take A Break

Take some time to stop working or walking around to sit down with your legislator. Share a cup of coffee or soda with them and talk about your job at greater length.

Demonstration

It's a good idea to end the tour with your specific work area so that you can then demonstrate what you do for them. It is important for them to see how you contribute to your team at work. If you use any supports, show them those supports and explain how they help you be more successful.

Take Pictures

During the visit, try to have someone take pictures every step of the way, either with their camera or cell phone. Legislators enjoy having photos of their public appearances. After the visit, send any photos to Liz Sensintaffar, at lsensintaffar@woodhaventeam.org so that we can share your successful visit with the rest of participants throughout the state.

SAMPLE TAKE AWAY SHEET

DID YOU KNOW?

Why business invests in **HUMAN CAPITAL**:

- People with Disabilities offer new perspectives on how to improve your business.
- Investing in people in the short run benefits your business in the long run.
- More than 50% of employees with disabilities require no accommodations.
- Most accommodations cost between \$0 and \$50 and often other employees report that those accommodations have helped them as well.

Companies like Walgreens and Marriott increase business by **MARKETING** that they hire people with disabilities because:

- 54 million Americans have a disability - making it the **second largest minority group**, just behind baby boomers.
- Hiring a person with a disability opens your business to new markets.
- 87% of the public would prefer to give their business to companies that hire persons with disabilities.

There is a large **RETURN ON INVESTMENT**. Since the 1950s, studies have consistently shown that workers with disabilities have:

- Average or Better attendance (which increases productivity)
- Lower Turnover (which saves hiring and training costs)
- Average or better job performance
- Average or better safety records

When people with disabilities are working side-by-side with other employees without disabilities, and are held to the same standards and expectations at the same pay, it means:

- **Increased revenues for the state.**
- **Decreased dependence on government benefits.**
- **Both without raising taxes or cutting programs.**

WHAT SHOULD YOU TALK ABOUT? (EMPLOYEE)

Your legislator is a person just like you, your family and friends. He or she will want to get to know you so that they can understand your story. You are an expert about how your job has helped you. Your legislator wants to hear about that.

Thank you for inviting your legislator to visit you at work. In order to have the most positive experience possible, we wanted to provide you with a few talking points you might find helpful.

These are only suggestions. You know about what your job means to you more than anyone. It's important to rehearse your thoughts so your message is clear and you can get directly to the point.

- **Some people thought I couldn't do this job, but I have proven that I can do it, and do it very well.**
(Give a short example of something on the job that you do really well)
- **I am important to my business because I am a hard worker.**
(Say that you think it's everyone's job to do their best, all the time)
- **The money I earn helps me depend more on myself and less on government; and when I pay taxes, the whole community benefits.**

Your legislator may ask:

"Do you really believe that all people with disabilities can work in the community?"

You may consider saying this:

"I don't know about all people, but many people thought I couldn't work and I have proven them wrong. I think that's true about most people with disabilities. They just need a chance to prove themselves. It's important to earn a living wage and be able to support myself as much as possible."

If you have time, you may consider asking your legislator:

"Do you know anyone with disabilities? What is your hope for them?"

Also ask:

"What do you think you can do to help other people with disabilities get jobs and careers they have a passion for?"

Be sure to say thank you; and, "I would be glad to talk to you or your staff anytime about issues that affect people with disabilities."

WHAT SHOULD YOU TALK ABOUT? (EMPLOYER)

Legislators have the power to assist people with disabilities in becoming self-sufficient, taxpaying citizens. You have a unique opportunity to share how hiring someone with a disability has positively impacted your business and the community.

These are only suggested examples, because you know about your business more than anyone. It's important to rehearse your thoughts so your message is clear and you can get directly to the point.

- **(Employee's name) is a great employee because he/she is reliable, conscientious and has a "can do" attitude that is contagious**
(Give an example of what this person does to be great a employee. Ex: always on time, enthusiastic, really good at what they do, etc.)
- **My customers tell me they really like (Employee's name) and that he/she is always helpful**
(Give some examples of customer comments)
- **Some people say that hiring a person with a disability is a form of charity. My business is not a charity and (employee's name) helps improve my business's bottom line**
(Talk about your employee's abilities. How have they had a positive effect on your other employees? Have you had to make accommodations? Talk about how those have had a positive effect on your business, such as making your business more accessible to your customers or improved the workplace for your other employees)

Be prepared for comments like, "Your employee is the exception, not the rule," and questions like, "Do you believe that all people with disabilities can work in the community?" or, "Why did you choose to hire this person?" Think about how you would answer questions like these ahead of time. If you had apprehensions, don't be afraid to admit it. ***This is a great way for you to then talk about how they've exceeded your expectations.***

Remember to thank the legislator for their time. Offer to discuss employment with the legislator or their staff at any time. Legislators like to know what their constituents feel about issues. Additionally, offering to be their resource on an issue increases your access to them and makes it more likely they will contact you in the future.

WORKING WITH LOCAL MEDIA

Inviting your local television, newspaper or radio reporters is a great way to create increased exposure for what you are doing. Their presence can change your visit from a private meeting to a public conversation. With the election around the corner in November, anything related to the reputation of your legislator and/or candidate will probably be of interest to the local media.

Press Release

Work with your facilitator or others in your support network to develop a press release to send to your local media outlets: the radio and television stations and newspapers in your area. A sample press release is included in this packet.

After sending in your press release, you should follow up with a phone call to ensure that they received it and to see if they are interested in attending. When inviting the media, remember that they do not have to participate in the entire tour, if you or your employer do not want them to. It's okay to set up a designated time and place for media coverage.

Because news changes so rapidly, members of the media often wait till the last minute to decide which events to cover. Don't take it personally if reporters cannot attend.

Does your business have a Public or Media Relations Department?

If your business has a public relations department, make sure you work with them to determine which reporters to contact. The PR staff might have existing relationships with area reporters that will be extremely helpful. The PR staff might even be willing to either help you write a press release, or write one on your behalf.

It's always a good idea to talk to the Public or Media Relations department if you are going to be inviting the media into the business. You want to make sure you don't break any rules while you are planning your visit.

Don't forget to plan to take your own pictures of the event. Even if your local media cannot make it, they are often interested in using submitted photos. Make sure you get permission from everyone in the photo before you submit it.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Place on Your Organization's Letterhead

DATE: *(DATE OF VISIT)*

FOR RELEASE: For Immediate Release

ATTENTION: *News editor name here (if known)*

CONTACT: *(Name & Phone Number)*

WHERE: *(Business Name and Address)*

REP. /SEN. (NAME) TO TOUR (BUSINESS NAME)

Throughout Missouri, workers with disabilities are improving our communities. These workers are contributing to their local economies, paying taxes and giving of their skills and talents.

(Legislator Name) will observe the work of an employee with disabilities at the *(business name)* to learn more about the contributions workers with disabilities are making in their communities.

Briefly describe the purpose of the tour and give a brief background on the individual's contributions to that business

To celebrate October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Missouri Chapter of the Alliance for Full Participation is promoting the Take Your Legislator to Work Campaign to acknowledge and celebrate Missouri workers with disabilities. Governor Nixon has made job creation a priority for our state, and this is an excellent opportunity to showcase the skills and talents of employees with disabilities in Missouri.

PHOTO/INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY:

(Designate Specific Time)

Choose a spokesperson from the business to answer questions about the individual's role at that business. Briefly describe the purpose of the tour and give brief background on individuals' roles in that business.

Rep./Sen. (Name)

(Spokesperson—Include Title)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: *(Name and Phone Number)*

If applicable, also give contact information for the business' Public Relations staff.

SAMPLE 'THANK YOU' NOTES (LEGISLATOR AND/OR CANDIDATE)

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to visit me at my workplace, _____. It meant a lot to me that you took the time to listen to my story and get to know me and my love for my job and my community. I really enjoyed meeting you and I hope that we can stay in touch in the future.

With gratitude,

Dear _____,

Thank you for taking the time to visit me at my workplace, _____. I hope that by learning about my story and what my job means to me, you have a little bit more understanding about the importance of integrated community employment to our state. I hope that this information can help you in the future as you approach these and similar issues in the legislature. I really enjoyed meeting you and would be happy to be of further assistance. Please feel free to call me at _____.

Thank you,

SAMPLE 'THANK YOU' NOTES (EMPLOYER)

Dear _____,

Thank you for allowing me to visit with our legislator at work. It was important to me to have the ability to share how much I love my job and what it means to me to work in my community. I wanted _____ to see just how much I can contribute to the workplace and how important it is for employers like you to give adults with disabilities the opportunity to share their abilities. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity you have given me by hiring me. It means a lot to me to be able to work at _____ with you and my co-workers.

Sincerely,
