

National Youth Leadership Network

Building power among young leaders with disabilities!



Jobs: Get Ready to Work!



IMAGE: Two construction workers are reviewing a blueprint.

A job is something you do to earn money. Jobs are an important part of our lives. Jobs provide money to pay bills and buy the things we need. Jobs can also be a way that people feel their worth in life. In a tight job market—or in any job market—it can be more of a challenge for people with disabilities than for people without disabilities to get and keep a job. For this reason, disability advocates say that the fight for jobs is important because having a job means you are on the path to independence.

Although NYLN believes that jobs aren't the only things that make people valuable to society, we realize that jobs are important. For young people, jobs help us explore what we are passionate about, learn skills, and connect with people.

Where to Look for Jobs

Knowing where to start finding a job can be a challenge, but opportunities are all around you:

- ✓ First figure out what your interests and skills are, then look at organizations and businesses that are working in those areas. (Look for work in a field that you like. When you do, you'll also bring enthusiasm to the table!)
- ✓ Check for job openings in local newspapers.
- ✓ Walk into nearby businesses and ask if they are looking for workers and find out what their job application process is.
- ✓ Go to job fairs.

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- ✓ Ask other people for help. See if your family and friends know people or organizations that are looking for staff.
- ✓ Talk with your school guidance counselor to see if he or she knows of apprenticeship or volunteer positions that might lead to paid-for work.

Volunteering with an organization is one way to get known and to help an employer see your skills and what you can contribute to their company. It can be a first step towards a paying job. Don't hesitate to ask about volunteer opportunities. Look for such opportunities in fields you enjoy such as the arts, math, recreation programs, working with children, etc. Also, keep an eye out for apprenticeship opportunities. Apprenticeships are another way to learn skills and to become known as a good worker. In an apprenticeship, you learn on the job. Apprenticeships can be paid positions or volunteer ones. This can be a win-win situation as they can be a time during which you learn needed skills while the company gets to know you and see your abilities.

- ✓ Seek support from your Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselor or the community One-Stops that usually are links between VR and the US Department of Labor.
- ✓ Check the Internet in job categories that interest you.

Once you identify job possibilities, then build a resume and submit an application using the suggestions that are listed below.

The Job Application

When you find the description of a job that you like, you will need to fill out an application. Make sure you know the deadline for the application, and be sure to allow enough time to have it in by that date. When filling out your application, don't go too fast. Each section needs to be filled out correctly. It is important to use neat handwriting or a computer to fill it out. If you choose not to use a computer, use a blue or black pen to fill out the application so that what you write can be clearly read.



IMAGE: A black pen with the lid off.

National Youth Leadership Network



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Most applications are divided into different sections.

Here are a few examples:

- Position:

Employers want to know what position you want in their company. They also want to know what hours and days you are available to work for them and the day you can start working.

- Education:

Include information on where you went to school. Start with the school you went to most recently and work your way back. List the names of each school, the dates you attended, the year you graduated, and what degree you got from the school. You don't have to list junior high, middle school, or elementary school. Also, list any certificates or certifications you have earned because they show the skills you have.



IMAGE: A graduate is standing on a diploma that is flying through the air.

- Employment Experience:

If you have had prior jobs, list where you have worked in the past. Start with your most recent job and work your way back. Include the name of your previous employer, the address, phone numbers, your salary, and amount of time you worked there. The people in the organization to which you are applying for a job may ask if they can contact your previous employers. If you say they can contact your past employer, be sure to let your past employer know that he/she may be contacted.



IMAGE: Blank yellow paper on a clipboard.

- Personal information:

Provide your current phone number(s), driver's license or identification information, and your current home address. If you get the job, you must let your supervisor [boss] know if any of these details change.

National Youth Leadership Network



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- References:

Either include the names of three references when applying for a job or write down "References Available Upon Request." References are recommendations made by people who know you well. Ask these people ahead of time for their permission so they are prepared when someone calls them. Usually you will list their contact information on your application. The company may well contact them and ask questions about you. You can pick teachers, friends, co-workers, or other people that know your skills. Don't use family members.

Activities

- Identify job possibilities by talking to people you know, contact organizations that are doing things that interest you, check in newspapers, talk to local business people, and look for local job information on the Internet.
- Once you find a job you are interested in, get an application form by contacting the employer or downloading it online.
- Follow the instructions for submitting the application and be aware of when it is due. Submit it on time.
- Contact your references ahead of time and let them know you have listed them as a reference for the job you are applying for.



IMAGE: A man is typing on a laptop to apply for a job.

Resources

- Sample Job Applications: www.jobsearch.about.com/cs/jobapplications/a/jobapplication.htm
- Sample Job Applications: www.worksmart.ca.gov/tips_application.html



Disclosing Your Disability

“Disclosing your disability,” means telling someone about your disability. You are not required to tell your employer that you’re disabled. Telling them is called “disclosing.” Think long and hard about disclosing your disability. Many times people are worried about disclosing their disability because the boss may not think they can do the job. However, disclosing one’s disability can sometimes make working easier because then you can be honest about what you need in order to do the job well.

Here are some things to think about:

1. Should I tell the employer ahead of time that I have a disability? (If you have a visible disability, it probably is best to tell the employer before the interview so they will not be surprised. If you don’t have a visible disability, you get to choose whether or not to reveal it during the application process.)
2. Do you need accommodations for the interview? If yes, it is probably best to disclose your disability before the interview so you can talk about the accommodations you need ahead of time. (For example, tell them if you need to meet in an accessible room or if you will need a sign-language interpreter.)
3. Does your disability affect your job skills? If it doesn’t, you don’t need to talk about it with the employer if you don’t want to. If it does, think about how the employer may react to your disability. Make sure your employer understands that you can do the required job if you are given the right accommodations. Describe your strengths in the job.
4. Can potential employers ask about your disability? No! Employers are *not* allowed to ask about a disability on the job application or at any time, including during the interview. If they do, you can choose to leave the question blank on an application or not to answer in an interview.



IMAGE: A man is reading a book in Braille.

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5. Should I talk up front about the accommodations I need to be a good employee? Don't be afraid to share what your accommodation needs are. These supports are what can make you a productive employee. Your self-advocacy skills will be important here because some employers may not feel comfortable asking what specific accommodations you need. If you are offered the job, and if you need accommodations, make sure to request your accommodations before your first day of work.

6. Also, become aware of community resources that provide the kinds of supports you need. (Note: Many employers worry about the cost of accommodations they may be asked to provide, but a large number of accommodations are very low cost, such as raised desks, equipment for computers, augmented listening devices, etc. Higher cost accommodations, but ones which still can help a company get an excellent employee may be received through the help of Vocational Rehabilitation or other community service providers.) These are important things to be aware of and to talk to your potential employer about early on in the hiring process.



IMAGE: A woman is handing a man her resume.

7. Do I know my rights both during the hiring process and also after I am on a job if my boss or fellow workers try to discriminate against me? It is difficult to know your rights all the time. There are lots of laws, and sometimes they change when legislation goes through reauthorization (that means it is updated/made current). If you feel that you need legal support, contact your state's Protection and Advocacy site. Every state has this service, and its people specialize in disability-related services and legal representation.