

WorkforceGPS

Voices of Experience

Business Services

Virtual Job Fairs and Career Exploration

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Freda Herndon: One of the things that's sort of an outgrowth of both of those things was our decision to purchase a virtual platform.

Virtual Job Fairs & Career Exploration

So we did do that. We were the first workforce area in Tennessee to launch that and we were able to do virtual job fairs, virtual hiring events, career exploration events. And probably one of the things I didn't think about on the front end was these high school seniors and people, students who were in a two-year program, they were ready to look for jobs and the economy was not very active at that point. So having Skills USA, which is a national program, but that was one of the first partners that we had to launch our virtual events.

Skills USA did a statewide event with us. There were 45 businesses. They had 696 students across the state who registered. So that was our first launch into the world of virtual job fairs and career exploration events. And it was interesting to look at the data of those almost 700 job seekers or students in that particular case, almost 500 of them that logged in for the event. So they registered and then almost 500, which is a really high percentage, actually participated in the event. But one thing I always look at with those platforms is the engagement. You know, it's one thing to go into a stagnant booth. But when you look at the chat conversation numbers, in that particular event, there were 837 chat conversations that happened, and that means individuals talking with an employer. So I feel like that may have been a higher engagement level than there might have been in a virtual event, because there was some one-on-one activity that that happened in a very meaningful way.

So that was one of our first events. We've had several since then. We've had about a dozen. I think we'll always now do virtual events for people in our rural counties. They're not having to drive to an event. For employers, they can incorporate recruiters from different locations that can staff an event. So it allows them to use their resources real wisely. For our Chamber of Commerce partners, that's another large event we had that was successful. The Rutherford Chamber, they were hearing from their employers, we've got open spots we can't fill. People are uncomfortable working or maybe don't have all the skills we need.

Their event, their virtual event had 36 businesses that participated. This was just in a community, so it wasn't a school environment where they were being made to sign up. They had 475 job seekers; about half of those logged in during the event. And then there were almost 500 chat conversations there as well. We've had some events that were much smaller, but those are two that as we began launching this, we realized this is really filling a void. It's a way for people to still connect when they may not be able to physically connect, and I think we will definitely continue to offer both the in-person and virtual hiring of career exploration events.

The secondary and post-secondary schools have really enjoyed this option and have taken advantage of it as well, which was something I didn't necessarily anticipate. So that's been

interesting and it's been nice to develop those relationships a little deeper and as a workforce board.

I already spoke in general about virtual services and the the in-depth connections that people were were able to make with recruiters and employers. There was also a negative side to that. And I think it's a great opportunity for us and for any workforce board there, any American Job Center out there, there is definitely a digital literacy gap, and that's something that we will continue to address by providing workshops; for example, on how to set up your profile prior to an event. People who may have worked their entire life in manufacturing aren't very comfortable in the digital world. They haven't needed it for their job. It's not that they're not capable or intelligent; they've just not been exposed to it.

So there is definitely a gap there. So that became apparent real quickly that we needed to do to have some sort of concentrated effort where we helped people feel comfortable in that virtual world, and we probably will continue that for a long time. We always talk about those those basic intro computer skills, but it was beyond that. It was more evident than that when we began using the virtual platform, so that was a learning we took away from launching the virtual services that has sort of changed the way we'll do business and the kind of services we'll provide through the American Job Center network. We definitely need to continue that digital learning at a very basic level and then beyond and move to a more intermediate and advanced level, because that's not really taught necessarily to our workforce.