

TRANSITION FAIR TOOLKIT

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**Western Michigan University
Career Connections
Research Center**



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Overview of the Toolkit

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) developed this *Transition Fair Toolkit* to help state and local planning teams implement and evaluate a transition fair. A transition fair can take many forms, although the purpose remains consistent: to connect students and their families with resources to build successful lives after high school. Across the country, local education agencies are holding events to bring students and their families into contact with community, education, and employment service providers, as well as employers and institutes of higher education. These events may have various names, including parent night, career fair, college conference, or agency fest. Whatever the name, the development and production will be similar.

This toolkit is a practical guide for local educators and leaders who are thinking about, in the process of, or looking to improve a transition fair. It provides descriptions of essential components of a transition fair, along with detailed planning tools and resources for implementation.

Importance of a Transition Fair

Concern for poor student outcomes after graduation has led to the development of activities to increase postsecondary success. While students with disabilities are making progress toward improved outcomes, recent data from the *National Longitudinal Transition Study-2* (NLTS2) reports that they are not keeping up with their same age peers without disabilities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). In an effort to fill the gap for students with disabilities, transition fairs have become a component of the larger transition services continuum. During the past nine years, NSTTAC has observed and assisted many efforts to plan and implement transition fairs. We have collected information and resources and are now disseminating them through this toolkit. By sharing these ideas, strategies, and procedures, we hope to help others through the process, increasing opportunities for students to learn about supports and services available to them as they transition to adulthood.

The purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 is to ensure that all children with disabilities are provided education and



services in a way that will prepare them for further education, employment and independent living. In order for schools to maintain compliance with the secondary transition requirements of IDEA, high school students who receive special education services set postsecondary goals as part of a transition planning process. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) must contain annual goals that connect students with school and community services to improve the student's academic and functional achievement. These transition services are to be based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. Schools are using transition fairs to fulfill many of these requirements by coordinating activities between students, family members, educational institutions, employers, rehabilitation agencies, and providers of community activities. Quality transition programming should lead to higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates, as well as improved rates of postsecondary employment, independent living, and enrollment in education and training.

Research into transition practices has illustrated that postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities improve when educators, families, students, and community members and organizations work together to implement a broad perspective of transition planning, more appropriately referred to as transition-focused education (Kohler & Field, 2002). Kohler and her colleagues identified effective practices that were organized into the five categories of the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming*: (a) student-focused planning, (b) student development, (c) interagency collaboration, (d) family involvement, and (e) program structure and attributes (Kohler, 1996). These five categories are considered to be best practices in the field of transition of youth with disabilities, and are the foundation of NSTTAC's work in identifying evidence-based practices, some of which are found in the *Transition Fair Toolkit*.

NSTTAC conducted a systematic literature review to identify in-school predictors of post-school success in the areas of employment, education, and independent living for secondary students with disabilities (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009). As a result of this literature review, NSTTAC has identified evidence-based predictors of post-school employment, education, and independent living success from the correlational research. They include career awareness, community experiences, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, paid employment and/or work experience, parental involvement, self-advocacy/self-determination, self-care/independent living skills, social skills, student support, vocational education, and work study. These predictors are critical components of a

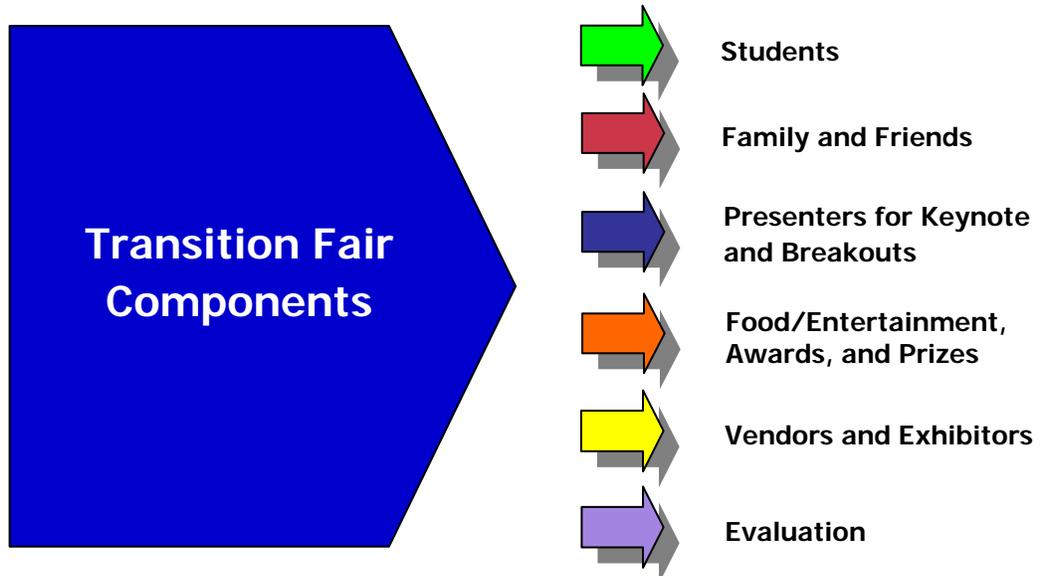
quality transition program and can also provide a framework for the content offered at a transition fair.

Key Elements of a Transition Fair

In this first section, we provide a description of a transition fair along with the purpose and importance. This section describes the contents of the toolkit in the areas of pre-fair planning, ongoing and final planning, implementation, and wrap-up of details after the event. In subsequent sections, we provide detailed resources for planning specific transition fair components, including examples of transition fair content and materials. Our suggestions are based on the implementation of dozens of transition fairs within various settings. While no two transition fairs will look exactly alike, the information, resources and materials included in this toolkit are considered by NSTTAC to reflect best practice. Many of the tools in this toolkit include suggested times for implementation, but we also include an implementation timeline example in the appendix. These materials are presented in a notebook format to enable you to copy resources as you need them and to add materials as they become available – materials from NSTTAC, other states, and your own experiences!

Key Components of Transition Fair

The model below illustrates key components of a transition fair.



Planning Your Transition Fair

Generally, a transition fair will last several hours. The purpose of the fair is to meet the needs of its intended audience, delivering content and resources that are most likely to impact student outcomes. After the fair, planners will use survey results to determine if the intended outcomes were achieved. Planning for a transition fair ideally begins a year prior to the event. We have broken down the planning and implementation of a transition fair along a timeline of planning: pre-planning (6 to 12 months ahead), ongoing planning (1 to 5 months ahead), final planning (four weeks to one day ahead), day of event, and after the event.

Pre-planning—Six to Twelve months before the event

Early in the planning stages, it is important to build a foundation to support further planning. The pre-planning process includes the initial decisions and groundwork. There are four focus areas to be addressed at the pre-planning stage, answering who, what, where, and when for the upcoming transition fair.

Roles and Responsibilities

Transition fairs have been successfully carried out by one individual as well as by an entire team. Regardless of how many people are involved in the planning of the event, it is important to designate responsibility. Some districts hold annual fairs that are planned by the students themselves, developing skills and meeting IEP goals as part of the process. Students have planned, phoned, emailed, and auditioned entertainment for the fair, in addition to directing activities on the day of the fair.

Developing committees early on in the process, splitting the work among individuals, can help to eliminate the long list of to-do's. A transition fair team may meet once a month or once a week; this can be decided by your team. Designating various roles and responsibilities is crucial to task completion, and the Pre-planning section holds tools to ease the process.

Resources and Funding

The cost to carry out a transition fair will certainly vary from location to location. Creating and maintaining a budget is part of the initial process. Schools have used funds from a variety of sources to create a continuum of services and amenities. Circumstances will undoubtedly drive the budget, but a successful transition fair can be held with whatever funds are available. Teams have used creative fund-raising approaches either before or at their transition fairs, (e.g., selling tickets to wear a hat or slippers to school on a particular day, or even the traditional bake sale), coming up with enough resources to deliver a meaningful experience.

Door prizes and other donations can be a vital part of the fun on the day of the fair. Door prizes might include meals at local restaurants, or a stay at a local hotel. After an initial phone contact, you can send a letter to request a door prize, and then a confirmation letter when the prize is arranged. A committee member should pick up all of the donations and later send a note of thanks.

A hospitality room for presenters and exhibitors may be supplied using donations or through the budget. When requesting donations for prizes, hospitality, freebies, or food and beverages, request specific items (e.g., 50 cookies, 100 bags for students to carry items they pick up at exhibits), or several small items for door prizes. Students might enjoy being a part of the fair by calling potential donors for initial contact or to follow-up on details.

Logistics

Determining the “when and where” of the transition fair can possibly have the biggest impact on your attendance and outcomes. Selecting the venue for your event might be as simple as reserving space within the school building. When this is not the best option, you may need to look into larger space at a local college or technical center. Whatever the location, details will need to be worked out, including facility contracts, the use of other building materials (e.g., tables, chairs), and time allotment.

Once the location has been determined, or while it is being determined, it is essential to decide on the best day and time for your fair. This decision should

be driven by the location availability, the intended audience, and the arrangement of a time that will work the best for as many of the stakeholders as possible. Other details in this section can include possible food and refreshments that will be available to participants. If there will be refreshments at your event, will there be a ticket required, will it be open to everyone all the time, or will there be any cost expected of the audience?

This part of the planning process should determine the level of involvement among stakeholders including the families, students, agencies, employers, local businesses, and community partners. The planning team should decide whether the fair will focus only on students with IEPs or on all students with and without IEPs, and whether parents will be invited, too. Will you use a keynote address, other presenters, breakout sessions, or a combination of all three as your medium for content delivery? Will the transition fair include exhibitors such as vendors, service providers, and local businesses? Section 2 will contain all of the information, resources, and examples within the pre-planning area.

Theme, Content, and Activities

The idea of having a theme for the transition fair may or may not be something you have thought about. While it is not necessary to build the components of your transition fair around a theme, increasingly we notice themes being used. The theme of the fair can be the focus for advertising the fair and decorating the location. Selecting a theme can help to shape content, including what the presenters or breakout sessions will present, what activities or entertainment might be highlighted, and what exhibitors will be chosen. Many activities at a transition fair could be linked to either annual or postsecondary goals identified in a student's IEP. Section 2 of this toolkit provides several examples of themes used for transition fairs.

Below is a list of potential transition interest areas that could help to define the content of the day's activities. The opportunities could be delivered at the transition fair through presenters, breakout sessions, exhibitors, or materials.

- Identifying and reaching long-term career goals
- Assistance with college applications and test preparation

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- College students with disabilities talk to students who are considering postsecondary institutions
 - Special services for students with disabilities at colleges and universities
 - Training and education for families and youth regarding living and financial options
 - Training for employers on issues related to hiring employees with disabilities
 - Coordination with other families and youth looking for adult living options
 - Financial issues including social security, financial aid, and scholarships
 - Budgeting simulation, in which each youth plays an individual with various budget needs and challenges

Activities at the fair could include an obstacle course to practice daily living skills or an information scavenger hunt to encourage students to ask questions of the exhibitors. A computer kiosk might be set up, for employment research, a short assessment, or to visit a website designed for youth in transition. Youth could sign up for state IDs, register with agencies, take a driver's exam on paper or online, create a personalized reusable shopping list, and register or request information from education and training organizations. Maximize fair opportunities by linking activities to annual and postsecondary goals in student IEPs.

Students may find mock or real employment interviews to be valuable, but interview activities take extra time at the event as well as extra planning. The fair planning committee must put in more time to recruit employers or interviewers, to choose a suitable location, and to prepare students for the interviews. If a mock interview activity is part of the fair, plan carefully and far ahead of time to provide the highest quality opportunity to participants.

Evaluation of Planning Process

As a final step in the planning process, it is important for committee members to complete an evaluation of the planning process. Some planners use a debriefing session, with one person recording comments and recommendations. Using a written survey is an easy way to collect information in a short time. Collect all of this information in a list of changes to make for the next fair.

Ongoing Planning—One to Five Months Before the Event

Beyond the pre-planning phase, planning must continue. This ongoing planning stage will take the majority of the planning time. Now that the initial details have been decided upon, it is time to get down to the real preparation. Taking all of the basic decisions on who, what, where, and when, it is now time to finalize, prepare, and promote. These details can be broken into four segments; finalizing logistics and content, securing exhibitors, advertising, and evaluation.

Finalizing Logistics and Content Delivery

Once you have decided on a location and date, you will need to secure your venue. Reserving your space could be as easy as making a phone call or it could require a contract agreement. This reservation should entail all the details regarding the location including the set-up, clean up, specific parameters of use, time frames, cost, etc. During this time, it would be useful to map out the lay-out of the fair to make sure you have enough space for everything you wish to provide. If you are having breakout sessions or presenters, you need to account for them in your floor plan.

The content delivery will be a key to a successful transition fair. An agenda should be constructed outlining the schedule for the fair allowing enough time for participants to navigate. Placement of the exhibitors, food and refreshment area, breakout sessions, and presentations should be strategic and meaningful. Section 3 provides examples of agenda and schedule materials.

Securing Exhibitors

Exhibitors bring a wide variety of information and resources to the transition fair. Do some brainstorming to create a list of all possible exhibitors in your area, keeping in mind your theme, content, and space limitations. Include local businesses, community recreation locations, colleges or other educational institutions, employers, vendors of products and services (such as transportation, equipment, software), rehabilitation agencies, other government entities, and health care providers.

Making initial contact with possible exhibitors helps to gauge the interest in participation. This contact can be made with a letter, email, or in person. Follow up on the initial contact with additional information in a timely manner to secure involvement. This will also be the time to answer any of their questions and concerns. Provide a list of expectations of exhibitors, including time involved, venue, materials, and evaluation. Once you have a commitment from the exhibitors, the committee should keep in contact with them periodically until the date of the fair. Create name tags and table signs for each vendor and provide them with all of the fair materials including a detailed floor plan of the venue and where their booth will be located. Encourage exhibitors to bring freebies to give away to youth, and provide bags in which students can carry their treasures. Section 3 will provide examples of exhibitor materials.

Speakers and Presenters

Even a transition fair that lasts just one evening should include at least one focal speaker, either for a keynote presentation or for breakout sessions. Once you have determined a theme or areas of content for the fair, brainstorm as a committee to develop a list of potential presenters. Prioritize the list of names so that you can call the ones you would most like to have as presenters first. Call to offer the opportunity to potential speakers, and follow up with a letter of confirmation. About a month before the event, ask what audio-visual equipment is needed, and offer to produce handouts for the presentation.

You may have a keynote presenter in mind who can speak on a topic related to the content of the fair. Your own former students may be good candidates to present or co-present at a transition fair, and a parent speaker can add yet another perspective.

Advertising

A transition fair will not be a success without participants. The most challenging aspect of any school event is often motivating the target audience to attend. As educators we have access to students, but to a lesser degree parents and families. Planners of the fair will need to address how to encourage your audience to come. Use multiple forms of media to advertise

the event. From posters in the hallways to ads in the local newspaper, spread the word of the event broadly. Most advertising methods will be free or inexpensive: flyers, posters, email blasts, Facebook posts, “tweets”, school district marquees and websites, or invitations sent home with students. It might be harder to work mailings or newspaper ads into the budget, but media outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers often have free community calendars in their publications. Regardless of the way you advertise, be sure to get as much information to the stakeholders as possible. If food, entertainment, raffles, or door prizes are part of the plans, announce those activities to grab people’s attention. Will the fair be held during the school day? Will all students be invited, or only those who have IEPs? Can teachers earn Continuing Education Units for their participation? What other incentives have been created to encourage attendance?

Students will be some of the best salesmen. Students will pass along information to their families, but typically for a price. Offering students extra credit or a small token of appreciation for attending can often get their attention and transmit the information to parents. Some districts give students time in class to contact parents and others to invite them to the fair.

Teachers and other district staff may be encouraged to attend a fair outside of school hours by offering a hospitality room, prizes for the largest number of students attending, or a prize drawing just for teachers who attend. Similar prizes or incentives could encourage parents and other interested stakeholders to attend the fair. Section 3 highlights some advertising materials and resources used by various educational agencies.

Final Planning—Four Weeks to One Day Before the Event

While you continue to keep track of details, it is now time to invite the community and to inform teachers and students of the highlights of the planning. Help students to understand what behavior is expected from them, and what they can expect from all of the participants who have gathered for the big event.

Inviting the Community

In the last few weeks before the event, notify teachers and administrators of the final details. Invite parents and teachers, administrators, business leaders, and others to the fair. Confirm registrations, especially if a lunch count is needed, or if special meal arrangements must be made. Give plenty of information to teachers, who are vital to the success of the event, and double check that all signs, nametags, prize slips, flyers, information sheets, and evaluations are being produced.

Expectations of Students

Students should be informed of exactly what is expected of them at the event, as well as how the day's activities will be of benefit to them. Students may need to practice some skills, especially if the fair is fulfilling an IEP goal in social or employability skills. It may also be necessary for you to prepare and orient presenters, vendors, and exhibitors to the needs and behavior of students who are severely multiply impaired or have intellectual disabilities.

Day of Event—Implementation and Onsite Evaluation

Evaluation of all the aspects of the transition fair is an important step, and is often forgotten. A transition fair can be a costly event. The school board or other funders will want to know that the fair has achieved its intended outcomes, and is worth the expense. Evaluation results can be the evidence of those outcomes. Is your intended outcome merely parent attendance, or is it to increase student knowledge of community resources, or something else?

At NSTTAC, we view evaluation as a tool for improving our work. We want to assist you in evaluating your transition fair to determine what worked, what didn't work, and what needs changing or replicating. Whether this is your first fair or your tenth, you will want to collect data on the logistics and success. There are many ways to evaluate various aspects of a transition fair. Sample tools in this toolkit draw from levels 1,2,5,and 6 of NSTTAC's Six Critical Levels of Evaluation. More explanation of our levels of evaluation are found in the *Evaluation Toolkit, Second Edition* found at our website: nstattac.org. Evaluations created for the students, parents, exhibitors, and planning committee members can be crafted to your individual event,

including key questions to gather responses in specific areas of interest to the planning committee.

Participants may be asked to take a pre-test and post-test to measure knowledge acquired, or asked to fill out a survey as they exit to find out if the fair was useful and relevant. You will want to know what students and families thought of the exhibitors, venue, food, speakers, breakout sessions and materials. It may be easiest to obtain student evaluations because you will have access to them after the fair. You will want to ask the exhibitors whether they want to return in the future, and about their experiences, perspectives, and concerns, about this year's fair. Finally, you will want to hear from all of the people who made the event happen. Ask every planning team member to provide feedback on the planning and implementation of the fair. Section 5 provides examples of evaluation instruments, enabling your team to create specific evaluations for your individual needs.

Section 5 also includes examples of schedules for participants, signs, a floor plan, and other day-of-event documents.

Evaluation of Participant Learning Outcomes

Planning participant learning activities at the fair and evaluation of those activities after the fair allows teachers to tie the opportunities provided by the fair to their students' annual IEP goals. IDEA (2004) requires the development of annual goals that are measured within the school year, as well as postsecondary goals which are not measured by school staff as they happen after a student has left high school, but which help to keep students moving toward satisfying adult lives.

Tying Transition Fairs to IEPs

Transition fairs are not only a great event for stakeholders; they can also feed directly into a student's IEP. At every IEP during the school year and at the beginning of the school year, create and distribute information about the transition fair. Encourage teachers to link student goals to transition fair activities.

Many activities at a transition fair can be linked to annual goals, providing opportunities for students to practice new skills. A transition fair can also address postsecondary goals, bringing services directly to students, meeting IDEA requirements at the same time. Transition components of IDEA legislation are designed to better prepare students with disabilities to access the supports and services necessary to reach their desired outcomes, assisting them to become as independent as possible. Specifically, the transition services requirements of IDEA are intended for educators to:

- Assist students and families in setting goals for life after high school
- Provide the most relevant high school experiences for the student's desired outcomes
- Connect students and families to supports and services inside and outside of the high school setting.

Samples of IEP statements are listed below. Statements such as these could be used to design annual goals for students that also support successful transition, or a link from a student's postsecondary goal to the activities and services that will enable the student to reach those goals.

- Identify specific rehabilitation services to which student can apply
- Explain the difference between entitlement and eligibility for services
- Identify community programs offering job placement or training
- Analyze the demands and expectations of the postsecondary education setting, accessibility, academic rigor, social life and activities, various living situations
- Identify potential service, employment, transportation, or healthcare providers
- Develop student's awareness of different jobs
- Discuss health care issues that may impact employment
- Analyze local labor market to identify job openings and local labor needs
- Explore work experiences: explorations, job shadowing, mentoring, and internships
- Analyze adult living options in the local area (e.g., group homes, supported living homes, roommates)
- Analyze locality for leisure recreation options in the community
- Analyze community for transportation options

Section 6 of the toolkit provides samples of annual IEP goals and related services. Evaluations are included to measure IEP goal measurement.

After the Event—Dissemination, Recognition, and Sustainability

Once the fair is over, and the hard work of planning and conducting a fair has paid off, there is still some work to do, including data collection and analysis, reporting to funders and other stakeholders, thanking the many who donated items, presented or exhibited at the fair, and looking back to help plan the next fair. The biggest suggestion for all of the post-fair tasks would be to do them as soon as the event is over. The longer the lapse of time, the less likely it is that these things will be completed.

Data Analysis

You have created evaluations and in some cases have already collected completed ones. Depending on your specific evaluation and your access to participants, you may be collecting some of the evaluations after the fair. In either case, once evaluation data is collected, it must be compiled, analyzed and disseminated. Make your analysis as simple or complex as needed to disseminate a report to funders and other interested parties. The results of your evaluations will also inform your planning for the next fair. Section 7 will provide examples of evaluation analysis and summary reports. Additional resources for evaluation can be found in NSTTAC'S evaluation toolkit or on the website www.nsttac.org.

Set a date to present the results of the fair to the school board and other major funders to present a summary of actual expenses, community resources used, the number of students served, and how they were served. Describe the student IEP goals that were addressed at the fair and ask funders to support the next fair. Keep a copy of every evaluation summary, for comparison after the next fair. Data from this year's fair will mean even more when used to compare to future and previous fair results.



Recognition of Presenters, Donors, and Exhibitors

Recognizing each individual, group, or organization for their effort and support is a necessary step in your sustainability of the fair in the future. Use simple words of appreciation, delivered by email, postal mail, in the local news, or over the phone. Committee members or students can create letters of thanks, make phone calls, or a card of thanks may be printed in a career tech program print shop. A flyer thanking all the contributors of door prizes, food and other donations may be included in the information packet distributed at the fair, and reprinted in local newspapers, school websites, and parent newsletters. Section 7 provides examples of letters to thank donors and other acknowledgements.

Sustainability—Planning for the Next Fair

One of your last thoughts to wrap up the transition fair is to keep the momentum going for the next year. Most individuals or groups who hold transition fairs intend to hold subsequent events. In order to make a smooth transition from year to year, it is important to keep all the notes, data, materials, examples of evaluations, and contact information of presenters and exhibitors. Discuss and record any suggestions of changes for the next fair. Anything you can replicate the next year will save you time and effort.

Some fair committees meet near the end of the school year to plan essential details for the next fair, such as the date and location, and to conduct early brainstorming for the content of the next fair. Each step in the process described in this toolkit is intended to help teams build a foundation to sustain a successful transition fair.