IOWA | Iowa Workforce Development

Job Shadows

A Simple Workforce Strategy to Support Workforce Readiness and Talent Pipeline Development

What is a Job Shadow?
Job shadowing is a structured observation experience where an individual follows a professional during their workday to learn about their daily tasks, responsibilities, and workplace culture without directly performing the job itself. It is a low-risk, educational and practical way to support workforce needs and strategies.

Purpose: The purpose of a job shadow is to provide firsthand insight into a specific role, workplace environment, and industry.

Why host a Job Shadow?

- **Increase Industry and Occupations Awareness:** Job shadowing allows students, recent graduates, or professionals considering a career change to observe a role in action, helping them determine if it aligns with their interest and skills.
- **Skill and Knowledge Development:** Observing experienced professionals help participants understand the tools, systems, and communications styles used in a role.
- Relationship Building: Job shadowing offers opportunities to **build connections with potential workforce partner pipelines** – schools, workforce training organizations – Job shadows can lead to next step connections for internships, project support, hiring and job referrals.
- Support **workforce readiness** among students: Providing job shadowing for local and regional students provides opportunities for them to witness real world scenarios can help students better understand what it takes to be work ready.

Additional Benefits

- Job Shadows can be used to **highlight a skills gap or high demand skills** need in your organization and/or the industry.
- Job Shadows can be used as an **internal strategy of cross-training and increase organizational insight**. It can help employees understand different roles, expand skills sets and prepare for possible internal mobility.

Where to Start?

- The job shadow checklist provides step-by-step guidance to assist job shadow development.
- For additional help or assistance finding participants contact Kathy Leggett, Business Engagement Liaison at IWD Kathy.Leggett@iwd.iowa.gov.

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Job Shadow Checklist

Consider having a designated point person for all job shadows to ensure the process runs smoothly.

1. **Define purpose and roles**
   - Clarify goal(s)
     - Increase industry or occupation interest
     - Increase skill and knowledge development
     - Community support and relationship building
     - Support workforce readiness among students
     - Highlight skills gaps
     - Highlight occupation needs
     - Internal cross training
   - Select appropriate roles/teams to host
   - Choose enthusiastic, communicative employee for hosts

2. **Plan Logistics**
   - Confirm date, start and end time, and duration
   - Determine number of participants you can accommodate
   - Reserve meeting space or work area if needed

3. **Prepare the Agenda**
   - Create a simple schedule
     - EXAMPLE: Job Shadow Agenda (4 Hours)
   - Plan hands-on activities or experiences appropriate for visitors
     - Use AI to provide examples of potential hands-on activities (if needed)
       - Example Prompt: Create a 45-minute hands on experience for a 16-year-old student to conduct during a job shadow experience at an advanced manufacturing plant.
     - Consider if participant(s) can attend an internal meeting or view a current or past project.
   - Build in breaks

4. **Safety and Compliance**
   - Determine if waiver, confidentiality agreements or visitor badges are required
   - Identify any restricted areas and review safety protocols
   - Ensure necessary PPE is available (if applicable)

5. **Pre-Visit Communication**
   - Send participants confirmation and expectations
     - Address and parking instructions
     - Dress code
     - What to bring/not bring
     - Contact person and phone number
     - Agenda overview

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Job Shadow Checklist (Continued)

6. **Prepare Staff**
   - Brief hosts on:
     - The purpose of the job shadow program
     - What the participant may already know (age, experience level, interests)
     - Talking point about their role, career path and skills needed
     - Any confidentiality boundaries
   - Encourage hosts to:
     - Explain what they're doing and why
     - Check in regularly
     - Allow time for questions
     - Share career stories, not just tasks

7. **Site Preparation – Set Up a Welcoming Environment**
   - Prepare a badge, workspace seat, or welcome sign
   - Make sure computers or sensitive screens are locked if necessary
   - Ensure the host knows when and where to greet participant(s)

8. **Wrap Up and Gather Feedback**
   - Ask the participant what they found helpful or surprising
   - Provide a brief reflection form for both participant and host
     - SAMPLE: Job Shadow Participant Reflection and Evaluation
     - SAMPLE: Job Shadow Internal Reflection and Evaluation
   - Use feedback to improve future job shadow experiences

9. **Follow up (optional)**
   - Send a thank-note message
   - Offer resources for next steps (career pathways, training programs, job postings)

Equal opportunity employer/program. Accommodations are available upon request: workforce.iowa.gov/accessibility