

# ENGAGING EMPLOYERS: BUILDING LONG-TERM EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIPS



## BUILDING LONG-TERM EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIPS MAXIMIZES THE BENEFITS BEYOND PLACEMENTS AND CREATES TRUE PARTNERSHIPS

Successful job developers know the secret to meeting employment performance expectations includes two key components—working with an array of employers and establishing a true partnership with each one. Based on feedback from discussions with a variety of employers, one of the biggest complaints employers have with job developers is that they are only involved until the placement is made. Job developers who “disappear” after the placement is made run the risk of missing future opportunities with that employer. Not only is a partnership opportunity lost, but it also makes more work for the job developer because he or she will continuously need to develop new employer relationships.

Although the initial stages of job development may feel one-sided with job developers focusing on meeting employers’ needs, as the relationship grows, so too can the benefits to a grantee. Of course, the initial benefit of placing an individual in employment is important, but there are additional ways to utilize employers to assist your participants and support your program.



Getting to this point, however, requires a foundation to be in place so the employer now feels he or she can trust the job developer as a valuable resource to meet his or her needs and that both parties are “in this together.” Timing is critical, but once a solid foundation has been established, many employers take their involvement to the next level and become a valuable resource to the program as well.

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This bulletin is targeted to job developers but is also useful to project directors. There is an important role for project directors in developing relationships with employers. Project directors also need to direct the work of job developers to ensure that activities are focused on bringing the greatest long-term value to the project. In this bulletin, we share strategies and skills job developers use to retain employers and develop strong partnership relationships.

**EMPLOYER RETENTION SERVICES**—The term retention can have different connotations for employers than it may for grantees. For employers, retention comes down to keeping good employees while minimizing rehiring and retraining costs. So what do employers want from job developers to help with these goals? For employers, it is simple; they want you to do what you need to keep the candidates you placed in the company productive, on time and positive contributing employees. Most employers are willing to be a part of the process to some degree but prefer that most of the work is done between you and the employee.

Remember this as you discuss post-placement requirements with your employers. These requirements will vary by contract and could potentially include face-to-face time, feedback, evaluations or other paperwork. If you plan on checking in with an employer (and you should!), be sure to discuss up front the frequency of your visits/calls, what you will be asking, how long it will take, and inquire what time is usually convenient. Employers do not like surprises, so you want to make sure they understand and approve

these arrangements. Always plan appointments in advance directly through the employer, do not arrange through your participant or show up unannounced. Also, if you plan on making a site visit, ask the employer how you can do so in a way that is non-intrusive and does not disrupt daily operations.

As an example of how you may discuss this with an employer, consider the following:

**Job Developer:** *I am so pleased you are interested in interviewing some of our candidates for your open position. We have already discussed the interviewing and hiring process. I would also like to walk you through the process after the hire. I will continue to meet with your new employee, but if it is okay with you, I would also like to stay in touch with you directly. Of course, any time you have a question, you should call me, but I would also like to check in with you on a monthly basis for six months. I can call at a set time or we can email to schedule something – really whatever you prefer. I can also come and meet with you in person if you like. Would this plan be acceptable to you?*

**Employer:** *Yes, over the phone is fine with me, and if you email me in advance, we can set a firm time.*

**Job Developer:** *Terrific – thanks.*

Following up with an employer can serve multiple purposes. In addition to finding out about employees you have placed, it is also the time to strengthen your relationship with the employer. Use this chance to see if he or she has additional hiring opportunities you can assist with by making referrals. This could be a chance to make additional new placements or find out about openings that could be promotional opportunities for employees you previously placed with the company.



Don't forget to use these check-in meetings as a way to find out how you are doing. Asking the employer for feedback on your services, approach, or follow through is a great way to get information but also a way to show the employer you are invested and are striving to offer the best possible customer service.

**GOING BEYOND PLACEMENTS**—Now that you have developed a stronger relationship with the employer, it is time to encourage further investment with your organization. Keep in mind that sales pitches should be service-based versus mission-based. The rationale is, first and foremost, to help the employer with his or her bottom line. Now that you have proven yourself as a resource the employer can trust, you can share more about your organization. This is not about keeping information from the employer; rather, it is about timing.

When it seems appropriate, discuss the mission of your organization or program with the employer. Describe your accomplishments, but also what your short- and long-term plans are and your strategies to achieve them. Don't be afraid to request that he or she join you in this call to action. Ask the employer how he or she might like to be part of the mission, but make direct requests as well. Some areas an employer can be a resource to grantees include:

- ❖ **Conducting Mock Interviews:** Explain to the employer what this entails, the type of candidate he or she might interview and describe the kind of feedback you would like to receive. Be sure to arrange most of the details for the employer and make sure you follow up in a timely manner to receive feedback.
- ❖ **Arranging a Site Visit:** Ask the employer to offer a tour of the company to your participants. If possible, request to meet one or more employees from the company for questions and answers. Be sure to schedule staff accompaniment and follow up with a thank you note from not only yourself, but also from the participants who attended the tour.
- ❖ **Joining a Business Advisory Committee:** If you don't already have one, consider forming a committee that meets on a quarterly basis and is made up of representatives from the business community, your organization and other key partners you might have that would be helpful. The goal of the committee is to assist in shaping employment services that can include programmatic or curriculum ideas, referrals, placements, event planning or other services like those previously mentioned. By joining a committee, the employer is making a statement

that he or she is invested in your organization and the participants you serve.

- ❖ **Industry Information:** Request that the employer agree to share industry information with you to which you might not normally have access. Be sure to explain how you will use this information, for example, curriculum or training, and follow up with implementation feedback.
- ❖ **Introductions or referrals:** Ask the employer if he or she would be willing to introduce you or refer you to the company vendor list or other partners he or she may know. Be sure to follow through after the introduction in a timely manner and keep the employer posted on the result of the referral.

- ❖ **Events and Fundraisers:** Employers can play a direct role in the planning, recruitment and participation of events and fundraising opportunities. Employers can add contacts to your guest list, be a keynote speaker, market the event or raise funds and donations.

- ❖ **Advocacy:** Employers can participate in advocacy efforts your organization sponsors. Messages



from the business community go a long way when presented to officials who shape policy.

Engaging employers is a skill that involves not just job developers, but the whole organization. While the depth of partnership will vary from employer to employer, the investment of time required to nurture relationships is evident. However, it is clearly worth it since in addition to placements for your participants, employers can become an invaluable resource to your organization.

**DEVELOPING A CHAMPION**—It is likely, as the employer participates in these activities, his or her interest and commitment to your organization will grow. Some employers will show real passion for the work you do. With this group of employers, take the relationship even further by developing a champion. These employers understand your mission and want to assist you in improving the lives of individuals you serve and the community at large. Consider some of the following activities for your champions:

- ❖ **Joining your Board:** For-profit representation on the Board is critical. Business knowledge, community connections and fundraising are all contributions Board members make to an organization. Be sure to involve senior leadership before reaching out to an employer.
- ❖ **Testimonials:** Employer recommendations or testimonials tell a powerful story and can be used for marketing, fundraising or community partnership building.
- ❖ **Press:** Along with testimonials, an employer telling his or her story to media outlets will resonate with viewers and can increase your organizational exposure and value in the community.

## RESOURCES

For more resources on building relationships with the business community go to:

<http://businessengagement.workforce3one.org>

and click on the “Training Curriculum” tab.