



## ENGAGING EMPLOYERS: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Successful job developers partner with local and regional employers to meet the needs these employers identify, training and supporting qualified candidates for in-demand jobs. This “dual customer” approach ensures that job placements are mutually beneficial for both employers and jobseekers.

Engaging employers requires patience, persistence, and flexibility on the part of job developers. It also involves a change in mindset: You are not seeking charity for your clients—you are offering value-added services to employers. Tips for successful employer engagement follow. They are drawn from several sources listed at the end of this tip sheet.

### Understand the Needs of Local Employers

Effective job-driven training demands a focus on employers’ needs. To customize training programs that will lead to successful job placements, you need to understand:

- The state of the local/regional job market,
- Where jobs are available and what skills are needed to fill them, and
- What challenges employers face in finding and keeping qualified workers.

There are several ways to gain and sharpen this knowledge. They include those noted below.

#### Use data

You can collect and analyze data to understand current and projected local, regional, state, and national labor markets. Look for information on the number and types of jobs available; projected regional job growth; and specific job characteristics, skills required, and career opportunities. Resources for labor market data include (see the companion document, *Providing Job-Driven Training and Engaging Employers: Resources to Help*:

- [Career One Stop](#), a partner of the [American Job Center Network](#)

- The U.S. Department of Labor’s [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- The U.S. Department of Labor’s [O\\*Net Resource Center](#)

In addition, local or regional economic development authorities often have data on labor market demand for particular industries or occupations in your area.

#### Meet employers and ask questions

*There is no substitute for meeting with local employers in person.* This is a critical part of your role as a job developer. Based on what you learn from the data you collect, you may choose to target (a) the firms of a specific industry (e.g., health care); (b) a specific occupational area that crosses a range of industries (e.g., IT); or (c) a single large employer in your area.

Meeting with employers can help you identify local industries that have a demonstrated demand for new workers; have low barriers to those with employment challenges, such as criminal records (see add title of next tip sheet and active link here); and that offer opportunities for advancement. Be sure to seek out Veteran-owned and Veteran-friendly employers.

When you meet with prospective employers, remember to find out what’s important to them before telling them what you have to sell. Research the company before you visit, and prepare questions that show you are interested in the employer’s needs. For example, you might say:

- I see you have just opened a second location. How is hiring for the new plant going?
- Jobs in your sector are expected to grow in the coming year. What challenges and opportunities does that present for you?

Before you pitch specific candidates, ask about the type of person in which the employer is interested. For example, you might ask:

- What type of person tends to be successful here?
- When you conduct an interview, how do you know if a candidate is right for the job?
- Are there any specific skills you think a Veteran would bring to the table?

Know who makes the decisions and cultivate relationships with them. Early on, you may need to get the buy-in of chief executive officers who can commit their firm to hire your candidates. Over time, you likely will work more closely with mid-level managers, including supervisory or human resources staff.

### Network, network, network

Become known as a friend to business. You can:

- Join and participate in organizations and trade associations that give you access to local businesses, including:
  - Employer associations
  - Professional human resources organizations
  - Workforce Investment Boards
  - Chambers of Commerce
  - Rotary and similar service organizations
- Attend local job fairs.

### Sponsor job clubs where employers can visit potential employees.

In addition to networking with employers, collaborate with a variety partners who can offer employment, training, and related services to help your clients succeed. These include:

- Colleges and universities
- Labor organizations
- Philanthropic organizations
- State and local human service agencies
- Vocational rehabilitation agencies
- Medicaid agencies
- Centers for Independent Living
- Supported employment providers

- Community- and faith-based organizations
- Other non-profit organizations

## Make the Business Case

Tell employers what you can do for them. Emphasize the services you offer rather than simply the candidates you can deliver. Use business-oriented rather than human services language. For example, instead of saying:

*“We are a nonprofit dedicated to serving Veterans who experience homelessness by helping them find meaningful employment. I’m calling to help find them jobs.”*

Say:

*“We find high-quality, entry-level workers for area employers at no charge. During the past year we’ve put 300 Veterans to work at companies like yours. How can we help you meet your hiring goals?”*

Remember to “consider yourself the employer’s partner, not a supplicant for jobs.”<sup>1</sup> Employers often receive résumés from people with limited education or patchy work histories, especially for low-skill jobs. You offer a value-added service by screening and preparing individuals before you send them to an interview. Services such as transportation or child care benefit employers by making it possible for individuals to show up on time; ongoing coaching may help improve job performance.<sup>2</sup> Highlight how you help individuals surmount these “challenges,” rather than talking about the “barriers” they face.

<sup>1</sup> Wyckoff, L., & Clymer, C. (2005). *Job Development Essentials* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Public/Private Ventures.

<sup>2</sup> Warland, C. (2014). *Effective Job Development*. National Transitional Jobs Network.

## Make a Successful Match

Your success in meeting the needs of both employers and jobseekers rests on your ability to make a successful match. As job developer Gloria Day advises, “I don’t waste the employers’ time by sending them someone who doesn’t fit.”<sup>3</sup>

Successful job developers must have an in-depth knowledge of what employers are seeking in successful candidates, the ability to prepare their clients for these in-demand jobs, and a process for making a good match. [Year Up](#), an organization that seeks to prepare urban young adults for careers and higher education, makes successful matches by using several key strategies.

First, its core philosophy of “high support, high expectations” ensures that students undergo rigorous technical and professional skills development while receiving the support they need to succeed. Second, the organization prepares a “due diligence report” for each participating employer. The report includes information on the corporate culture and work environment, workplace demographics, dress code, physical environment, and the potential supervisor’s managerial style, among other characteristics. This information is then aligned with information about students’ goals, interests, and aptitudes. Finally, job developers evaluate the success of their placements and offer ongoing support needed to make them work.

Despite your best efforts, sometimes a match doesn’t work. Typical problems include a poor attitude, absenteeism, or lack of professionalism. Remember to pay sufficient attention to educating jobseekers in these “soft skills.” If problems arise, pick up the phone and talk to the employer. Offer assistance in resolving the problem. Working through these challenges together may help strengthen your relationship with employers over the long term.

<sup>3</sup> Wyckoff & Clymer, 2005.

## Develop Long-Term Relationships

One of the best ways to develop long-term relationships with your employer partners is to involve them in the design and delivery of education and training. This helps ensure that graduates of your training programs are well prepared to meet the employers’ needs and will result in a higher likelihood of successful employment for your clients. As industries evolve and employers’ needs change, training programs can be updated to reflect these developments. Employers can also:

- Mentor jobseekers.
- Conduct mock interviews.
- Join your advisory board.
- Provide training.
- Serve as guest speakers.
- Provide up-to-date, accessible equipment and technology.
- Become champions for your work.

Remember, this is a two-way street. To serve employers’ needs, you can:

- Provide space for employers to conduct job interviews with your clients.
- Share information about new government regulations, policies, and incentives that may affect the employer’s business.
- Respond to their cyclical hiring needs. Check with roofing and construction companies in the spring, retailers before the holidays, and food processors during harvest times to be certain their labor needs are met.<sup>4</sup>
- Invite them to evaluate your program’s curriculum and assess your clients’ performance.
- Show appreciation in small ways. Send a thank you note or call when they make a hire.
- Show appreciation in larger ways. Host an annual appreciation awards breakfast or secure media coverage of their support for your program.

<sup>4</sup> Wyckoff & Clymer, 2005.

## Resources for More Information

- [By Design: Engaging Employers in Workforce Development Organizations](#)
- [Effective Employer Engagement: The Year Up Model](#)
- [Effective Job Development: Strategies for Working with the Chronically Unemployed](#)
- [Job Development Essentials: A Guide for Job Developers \(Second Edition\)](#)
- [Working with Employers: Skills and Strategies for Job Development Success—Participant Workbook](#)
- [Working with Employers: Skills and Strategies for Job Development Success—Facilitator Guide](#)

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