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MassWorks: One-Stop Collaborations: The Key to Expanding Your Workforce Connections

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RESOURCES

Find out what the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development has to offer at www.mass.gov/dwd. Check out the Upcoming Career Center Events link at the bottom of the page.

Locate a One-Stop near you at www.servicelocator.org; or call 1-877-US2-JOBS.

Find out about events and training at local One-Stops at www.careerjournal.com/calendar/massachusetts.html

Connect to workforce service providers for resources, training and networking opportunities at <http://cwc.cedac.org/>.

EVENTS

Innovative Employment Strategies: A Comprehensive Training Series is a certificate program beginning in March 2008. Get more information and register at www.nercep.org.

Available in April, Career Development for Employment Staff is an online course for employment providers. Visit www.nercep.org for more information about this and other online courses.

Positive Employment Practices: How to Best Approach and Educate Employers will focus on services for individuals who are blind or have low vision. For more information on this two-day conference in Portland, Maine, on April 30 and May 1 go to www.rcepl.org or call 508-767-7371.

One-Stop Collaborations: The Key to Expanding Your Workforce Connections

Introduction

For those of you who have little or no experience with One-Stop Career Centers, you may ask, "Why should I invest time in creating relationships with my local center?" The answer: connections and resources. Finding ways to collaborate with the mainstream workforce system can not only expand the opportunities for the people you serve but position your organization as a valuable resource to the workforce development system.

What are One-Stops?

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 mandated One-Stop Career Centers to deliver public workforce development services. The intent of WIA was to bring together a wide range of federally funded employment and training programs to create an integrated service system to meet the needs of all job seekers. One-Stops may include additional programs and services in addition to those mandated by WIA.

There are currently 33 full service One-Stops throughout Massachusetts and four satellite centers, which are overseen by local Workforce Investment Boards.

While the range of services varies from center to center, job seekers with disabilities should expect to receive the same types of services at a Career Centers as anyone else. There are three levels of services.

- ▶ Core services are primarily self-directed services that include but are not limited to an intake assessment, work skills exploration, resume development and access to job banks and listings, as well as electronic resources (such as computers and fax machines.)
- ▶ Intensive services are available for those who were unable to find work using core services and who meet other eligibility criteria. Intensive services include assessment, career counseling and the development of an individualized career or employment plan.
- ▶ Training is available to those who meet eligibility criteria and have not secured employment through the first two levels of service. Job seekers may be eligible for training with funding through Individual Training Accounts. While services vary depending on available funds, job seekers may have the opportunity to participate in occupational skills training, adult education and literacy, on-the-job training and more.

The bottom line: a job seeker can walk into to a One-Stop, register, and generally start receiving some services almost immediately.

Why should I try to partner with the One-Stops?

Since employers are also customers of the One-Stops, they use the centers to screen potential applicants, recruit job seekers through electronic postings and organize job fairs. Developing collaborative relationships with the One-Stops may create opportunities to increase employer contacts and expand your networks as well as gather information about current labor market information and trends.

Participation in services at the local Career Center can also “normalize” the job seeking process for people with disabilities. At One-Stop centers people from all backgrounds—such as dislocated workers, career changers and Welfare to Work participants—are all there with a common goal. Job seekers with disabilities may discover that they are not the only ones who find it challenging to obtain employment. Additionally, they will learn to use generic resources that may help them in future job searches. Finally, the presence of job seekers with disabilities at the One-Stop sends a message to individuals without disabilities, who get to see people with disabilities as viable and interested candidates in the labor pool.

Why should the Career Center want to collaborate with my organization?

Career Centers receive much of their funding based on outcomes they achieve through placements. The job seekers you serve represent an untapped pool of people that can benefit from Career Center services. When they become employed, this contributes to the Centers’ outcomes.

Rehabilitation providers should be aware that they represent an important resource of expertise. One-Stops are open to the public, and therefore provide services to customers who may have disabilities but are not receiving any support services. Your organization can provide training and information to

Disability Program NAVIGATORS

An effective way to connect to your local One-Stops is to contact the Disability Program Navigator that serves your area. Disability Navigators were established through collaboration by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Social Security Administration. They are responsible for helping customers with disabilities understand the work support programs available through the centers, facilitating connections to disability resources in the community, and increasing linkages to potential employers. To find out more, contact the navigator in your area.

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Career Center staff that can help them effectively serve these customers. You may also be a resource to the Business Service Representatives who work directly with employers.

What do partnerships look like?

There are a wide range of possibilities for collaboration. At an informal level a job developer can accompany a job seeker to the Career Center, helping them through intake and orientation and providing them with assistance using the various job search related resources. At a more formal level a provider may join a task force or advisory committee developed by the Career Center or become active in their region's Workforce Investment Board. Provider organizations can also collaborate with One-Stops through educational workshops, job fairs, transportation initiatives and other community activities. Some One-Stops have agreed to offer a space, with a desk and phone, to a provider agency for a few days a week to meet with referrals from other staff at the center.

Can you give me some examples?

Massachusetts has been a leader in initiatives that have increased the capacity of One-Stops to serve people with disabilities. The collaborative efforts between Career Centers and provider agencies range from informal partnerships to formalized cooperative efforts through grant funding. However, you don't need a grant to collaborate with One-Stops. Here are some examples:

- ▶ The Career Place in the Metro North workforce region provides ongoing office space to a community rehabilitation provider. Their collaboration with disability agencies also includes organizing job fairs, hosting panel presentations for employers (such as one that discussed issues for job seekers with psychiatric disabilities), and delivering employment-related workshops. They also host an ongoing inter-agency work group of disability service providers.
- ▶ The Bristol Workforce Investment Board and the New Bedford Career Center have collaborated with state agencies, non-profits and employers to host a resource fair to educate employers, jobseekers and other stakeholders about issues related to employment and disability. The region also hosts a job developers' networking group, where job developers from rehabilitation programs and One-Stop staff meet to discuss workforce issues and share job leads.
- ▶ The Metro South/West region has formed a business leadership group involving non-profits, with more than 75 members.
- ▶ The New Bedford and Cape Cod regions have reached out to local transit systems to improve the transportation situation for job seekers with disabilities.
- ▶ At the Career Center in Springfield, staff from a local disability service provider used space at the center to teach a computer class, with the curriculum modified for people with cognitive disabilities.
- ▶ At Career Point in Holyoke, a staff position focused on serving individuals with disabilities is co-funded by the Career Center and a local disability service provider.

How do I start the conversation?

A good way to start is to go to your local center and ask for a tour. Consider meeting the Disability Program Navigator. Disability Program Navigators serve every Career Center in the state and they help to ensure access for people with disabilities at the Career Center and pursue linkages and resources in the community.

Most navigators also facilitate Disability Action Committees (DAC) in their region. A DAC may consist of representatives from local rehabilitation providers, Chambers of Commerce, Career Center staff, state human service agencies, and other stakeholders. Taking the initiative to be active in your region's DAC can open a range of possibilities in helping your clients connect to the workforce.

An important fact to remember is that developing collaborations between organizations is like forming any other new relationship. It takes time and each party brings something valuable to the table. Start with what your organization has to offer. You bring capable job seekers and expertise in accommodations and accessibility issues that make you a valuable resource to your local One-Stop.

Working Together

It is easy to talk about collaboration. Making it work requires strategic commitment. One employment provider serving individuals with disabilities felt strongly that working effectively with the Career Center in their area would enhance the services they provide. In order to move forward they implemented the following strategies:

- All new staff go through the Career Center orientation in order to become familiar with Career Center services.
- Each consumer they serve registers with the Career Center. Job seekers use the Career Center as part of their job search in ways that meet their specific needs. This may include using the resource library, signing up for employer recruiting events, and taking classes and workshops, with provider staff supporting them as appropriate. Use of the Career Center varies according to individual needs and goals.
- The Career Center provides space for the employment provider to hold their job club resulting in a stronger employment focus and activities away from the "human service" atmosphere of the agency.

Working closely with the Career Center has been beneficial in many ways. In addition to providing greater access to job listings and employers, and enhancement of the job seeking skills of the consumers, this relationship has:

- Enhanced the general capacity of the Career Center to serve individuals with disabilities
- Provided an opportunity for individuals to participate in activities in an integrated community setting which benefits both the individuals and other community members.
- Expanded networks for staff through their interaction with Career Center staff and other entities connected with the Career Center.

As a result of these activities, the employment agency has partnered with the local Career Centers and workforce board on a number of grant-funded initiatives that will benefit both the employment agency and the One-Stop system.

This issue of MassWorks was written by Rick Kugler. Special thanks for contributions by David Hoff, Lesli Gazerro, Lisa Matrundola, Barbara Parmet and Cindy Thomas.

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