

State Agency Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Communication

Pennsylvania's Employment Newsletter: A Communication Strategy to Promote Employment

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Background

The State of Pennsylvania's Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) created a monthly newsletter called The Employment Update, which covers state- and nationwide news about the employment of people with disabilities, including intellectual/developmental disabilities. The Employment Update is sent via email to state agency contacts and a large stakeholder community, including individuals with disabilities, service providers, state associations, employers, advocacy groups, family members, representatives from academia and others.

The Employment Update contains information about employment trends, employment policy, trainings and conferences throughout Pennsylvania and nationwide. The newsletter also contains information about employment grants and project activities, including links to articles covering topics such as workplace supports and stories of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in community employment. The newsletter has become an invaluable resource, consolidating employment information from various sources and presenting it in one easy-to-read format.

Implementation

ODP developed the Employment Update in 2003, as part of their Employment First initiative (a statewide emphasis on promoting community employment outcomes for people with ID/DD). Since this time, the Employment Update has been a vehicle to share activities and products associated with this new initiative, including manuals, promising practices,

training, technical assistance opportunities, as well as research studies and reports.

The Employment Update has become a single source of information on efforts to increase community-based employment. While various state agencies, associations, and universities provided such information, many parties were unaware of each other's resources. The Employment Update regularly takes information from these and other sources and disseminates them to a broader community. This ensures that all stakeholders are up-to-date about the resources that are available and the events that shape their work.

Probably the most challenging aspect of establishing the Employment Update has been ensuring its broad dissemination. Efforts to widen the database of recipients are ongoing and have expanded to include Work Incentive Planning and Assistance counselors, counselors from the district's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, One-Stop Career Center staff, and secondary education staff.

Impact

The ODP Employment Update helps stakeholders increase their awareness of employment-related issues, activities, and programs in a timely and consistent manner.

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www.thinkwork.org/aie/ppsa
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(service provider practices)



The Employment Update has also helped stakeholders see employment as an area that deserves special attention. National news items in particular have offered readers a wide perspective on promising practices, innovative approaches, and possibilities that were beyond their own experiences. Reading about the attention being focused on employment outcomes across the county also underscores that Pennsylvania is not alone in trying to transform its service system in support of community employment.

Suggestions for Replication

- » Simple, email-based newsletters can be a relatively straightforward and uncomplicated way to maintain a consistent focus on your mission.
- » Recognize the multiple purposes of a newsletter, including developing a sense of common purpose, building a lasting community of interest, and increasing the knowledge base and capacity of the field.
- » Cast a big net. Having a wide range of stakeholder groups receiving regular information about employment shines a spotlight on the valuable role of work for meaningful inclusion in one's community.

For more information on this practice contact thinkwork@umb.edu



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