Lessons from the Diversity Partners Project: 5 Years Later
New York State APSE Employment Institute
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Plan for this session

- A brief review of Diversity Partners, a 5-year, federal project funded by NIDILRR
- Presenting problem: Why Diversity Partners?
- What we learned
- Barriers to implementation
- Implications for the future of our field
- Your ideas and input: Continuing the conversation!
The ones who don’t want to work get me down on everybody until I mistrust the motivation of everyone who comes through a state agency. But the help has to be worth more than the cost. It has to be timely, useful, and something I can trust. I’m not going to ask for help a second time if you take too much of my time or don’t give me something I can rely on.

Diversity Partners....

Target Audience

Disability Service Providers

Workforce Development
“KT”
Knowledge Translation

“The multidimensional, active process of ensuring that new knowledge gained through the course of research ultimately improves the lives of people with disabilities, and furthers their participation in society.”
- NIDRR, 2005

“Meaningful interaction with people who will apply the findings in their everyday lives is critical to this process.”
- Sudsawad, 2007

How can Diversity Partners help?

The Diversity Partners Model Emphasizes:

• An approach to partnership that is business/industry-focused
• Moving beyond “one person, one job”
• Employer partners are critical
• Efforts will not result in jobs without meeting business needs
From Year 1 to Year 5

Leadership
- Focused on planning and strategies
- Organizational structure
- Facilitators guides
- Conversation guides
- Action planning tools

Frontline
- Videos
- Worksheets
- Case scenarios
- Assessments
- Discussion guides
- Resources

Topic 1: Getting to Know the Job Seeker
Leading with Strengths
Skills, Culture & Needs
Raising Expectations
Strengths-based Assessment

Topic 2: Preparing the Job Seeker
Changing Expectations
The Importance of Social Capital
Approaching the Topic of Disclosure
Requesting & Negotiating Accommodations
Jobseeker Engagement
Apprenticeship and Training for People with Disabilities

“The Toolboxes”
www.buildingdiversitypartners.org

From Year 1 to Year 5

Leadership toolbox
Online toolbox for frontline staff
Technical assistance, training

Frontline topics include:
Topic 1: Getting to Know the Job Seeker
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Skills, Culture & Needs
Raising Expectations
Strengths-based Assessment

Topic 2: Preparing the Job Seeker
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The Importance of Social Capital
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Apprenticeship and Training for People with Disabilities

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Frontline Topics Include:

**Topic 3: Understanding Disability at Work**
- Who are People with Disabilities
- Disability Language & Etiquette
- What You Need to Know About Disability Rights

**Topic 4: Building Relationships**
- Assessing Employer Need
- Perception is Reality: Building Your Professional Identity
- Understanding and Using Policy Initiatives: Impact on Practice
- Industry and Sector Expertise

**Topic 5: Sustaining Relationships**
- Enhancing Your Value to Employers
- Partnerships and Business-Led Coalitions

**Topic 6: Navigating Complex Relationships**
- Dealing with Rapid Change
- Breaking Down Silos

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**Literature Review**

- Poorly compensated direct support personnel with a high rate of job turnover (Bogenshutz, Hewitt, Nord, & Hepperlen, 2014)
- Developing effective methods of encouraging the adoption and use of promising practices in community-based organization settings (Gilbride and Sensrud, 2008)
- There are gaps between the support needs of employers and what they are offered by community-based disability services (Kinnonen, Fabian, Buchanan, & Loecking, 2011; Waterhouse, Kimberley, Jonas, & Glover, 2010)
- Acquiring competencies around developing and maintaining relationships with employers and supervisors are associated with positive vocational outcomes (Corbiere, Brouwers, Lancort, and van Weeghel, 2013)
Literature Review

- Implementing demand-driven strategies to create sustained and productive relationships with employers (Unger, 2007)

- Being knowledgeable of and responsive to the everyday reality and organizational culture of employers (Gustafsson, Peralta, & Danermark, 2013; Henry, Petkauskos, Stanislawzyk, & Vogt, 2014; Stensrud, 2008)

- Tying job development activities to regional economic initiatives and industry clusters (King, 2011)

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Interviews started with YOU at NYS APSE!

“To get us started, tell me about a recent job placement.”

30 Interviews in 4 States!

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The Pilot Phase

- 2 sites for each stakeholder group, geographically dispersed
- 2 days of intensive leadership training
- 2-3 months of engagement with frontline tools
- Ongoing feedback, evaluation, and refinement
Pilot Testing: Questions and Reflections

• What do staff need to have the capacity to create mutually-beneficial business partnerships?

• What skills should be developed or learned?

• How does your organization define meaningful work for people with disabilities?

• What is your organization doing to engage business partners?

Lessons Learned: What Worked

In your experience, what are “carriers” (promising practices) that promote effective business engagement?
1. Active engagement with employment service professionals

"Presentations on research and best practices are very interesting, but I need something I can use with my staff today."

2. The Value Proposition

"Look at yourself as being valuable to employers. There are so many ways!"

"Thinking outside the box—about ourselves and our role in the community..."

3. Capacity Building:
Devoted space for collaboration and action planning

"In the break-out groups, the most important thing was connecting with people. Splitting up in groups—it was a really great experience."

"For me, the 2 days really pulled things together. I went from understanding bits and pieces to a more cohesive picture; both around content and knowledge, and our different services and units."
4. An Internal Champion

“Partnership initiatives are more likely to survive if they have a champion, one who ensures that momentum is maintained, and that the goals of the partnership are achieved.” (Bryson, 2006)

“It can lead to more interactions with managers: discussing, asking questions...instead of being told what to do.”

5. Quick & Easy Access to Online Training & Tools for Business Engagement

“It felt like it would be useful for beginners for background information, for learning how to do the job.”

“It would also be useful for people who have been in the field for a while: for resources, new ideas.”

Other benefits noted by users...

- Flexibility and adaptability to the varying skill levels and to the learning needs/learning styles of the user
- Customization of learning experience
- Quality and usefulness of the web training content
- Links to many helpful resources
- Content grounded in research yet very relatable to the field (KT)
- “Lightbulb moments”: ideas, energy, and motivation to innovate and implement new ideas in our work
Lessons Learned: **Barriers**

In your experience, what are **barriers** to implementing effective business engagement strategies in the field of employment services?

**Time**

“Unfortunately, after it was wrapped up, it got buried under all the day-to-day work.”

**Caseloads**

“This is great information, but we’re so strapped for time. When are we going to do all of this?”

**Billables**

“Honestly, I felt bad putting this work on staff. Completing the modules for this process will be difficult when we cannot bill for services during the time the modules are being completed.”
A Call to Action: Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

“Our mindset related to change can make the difference between moving forward, getting stuck, or giving up.”

- Dweck, 2017

A Call to Action: “Street-level Bureaucrats”

• Frontline Staff as Street-Level Bureaucrats: Key players in the implementation of new policies and regulations *Lipsky, M. (2010)

• Can make or break change processes in an organization

• SLB happen when organizations make choices about how to structure programs and staff make choices in their everyday work that impact the quality and availability of services

A Call to Action: Leadership Matters!

Organizational Leadership Frontline Staff

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As a field, what do we need to change, improve upon or do more of in order to more effectively engage with businesses?

Implications for Future Efforts

1. **DSP:** Explore practices that support capacity building for supervisors/managers, including methods to foster and support organizational champions for change related to adopting improved business engagement strategies.

2. **WD:** It is clear that outreach and support is necessary to promote inclusive practices for job seekers with disabilities within the WDS.

3. **ALL:** Further evaluation of efforts promoting inter-/intra-agency strategic planning, and better aligned, more cohesive planning among community partners charged with building bridges between job seekers with disabilities and employers.
References

References


