



TRAIN, RETAIN, ADVANCE

INCREASING EMPLOYMENT. STRENGTHENING RETENTION.
ADVANCING OUTCOMES.



Findings and Best Practices from our Train the Trainer
Retention Strategies Forums

IAJVS Retention Strategies Forums

Back in 2002, the Bank of America Foundation spearheaded a national strategic partnership with the International Association of Jewish Vocational Services (IAJVS) to collaborate on innovative workforce development programs that successfully help individuals and their families move toward economic independence. Bank of America Foundation recognizes the progression from the first opportunity through training, retention and career advancement.

By supporting many capacity-building initiatives implemented by IAJVS and its network of 28 non-profit, non-sectarian, human service organizations, this partnership has enabled hundreds of thousands of individuals to enhance their self-sufficiency and obtain the skills to be successful in today's economy.

Train-the-Trainer forums held regularly at IAJVS' Annual Conferences have been critical components of this work. These forums have

ranged from microenterprise and business development to enhancing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities; from creating financial literacy workshops for low-income older adults to fostering youth development through vocational and educational services; and from developing employer-directed training to transitioning teens from school to work.

Sharing in Solutions

In 2009–2010 this partnership continued its work with a focus on strengthening career retention and career advancement strategies by enhancing the capacity of IAJVS affiliates to serve those in need of employment services. The major goals of the project were to:

- ① **Enhance the skills of the IAJVS network professional staff in working with the targeted populations.**
- ② **Continue to develop and enhance the national and local organization infrastructures.**

The project enabled the training of 32 staff from 28 agencies, primarily through two one-day affiliate network Retention Strategies Forums. The first was held in May 2009 and the second in April 2010. The workshops were facilitated by staff from Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), a national nonprofit research organization focused on identifying and evaluating effective practices in social programs and disseminating information about them in the larger field. Components of the Retention Strategies Forums included the following:

- A presentation by P/PV on some of the key learnings from existing research about effective job retention and job advancement strategies, as well as additional “on the ground” experiences of high-performing workforce development practitioners.
- Peer discussions in small groups about common challenges and possible responses.
- Dialogue with employers from CVS Pharmacy and Humana, Inc. about their strategies for partnering with workforce-related agencies to improve hiring and retention practices.
- A panel and discussion with representatives of IAJVS affiliates in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco about their approaches to increasing job retention and advancement results.
- A “world café” networking event around “promising retention practices “ identified and documented by each affiliate.
- Action planning by each affiliate to identify priority strategies and implementation steps moving forward.

P/PV also facilitated three conference calls with staff of IAJVS affiliates to identify common issues before the first conference and share implementation progress in the period between the 2009 and 2010 Forums.

In the midst of the 2009-2010 Retention Strategies Forums, the effects of the recession were being felt strongly and IAJVS affiliates were stretched to address the employment needs of many more jobseekers than usual. Nonetheless, affiliates identified exciting plans for not only increasing employment results for their clients but also for strengthening job retention and advancement outcomes.

Learnings from Workforce Development Research

The work of research organizations in the workforce development field provides good insights about the types of approaches that support increased job retention and advancement for participants.

ALIGNING SKILLS WITH NEEDS

Public/Private Ventures' Sectoral Employment Impact Study (2010 report), focused on the sectoral employment approach of three mature non-profit organizations (including JVS Boston). Each organization has created industry-specific training programs that prepare unemployed and underskilled workers for skilled positions in a particular sector, and also connect them with employers seeking to fill such vacancies. In a random assignment evaluation, P/PV found that participants in sector-focused programs earned significantly more than control group members and worked more consistently, especially in the second year of follow-up. They were also significantly more likely to work in jobs with higher wages and that offered benefits.

While the three programs in the study each used a unique strategy in response to local circumstances, P/PV identified five common programmatic elements:

- 1 Strong organizational capacity, with the ability to understand and adapt to change.
- 2 A strong link to local employers that results in an understanding of the target occupation and connections to jobs.
- 3 Job readiness, basic skills and hands-on technical skills training offered through the lens of a specific occupation or sector.
- 4 Recruitment, screening and intake processes that result in a good match between the applicant, the program and the target occupation.
- 5 Individualized services to support training completion and success on the job.

EXPLORING NEW APPROACHES

The Urban Institute's Research Review on Innovative Approaches to Retention (2007) reviewed past and current research on employment programs and also identified new and untested approaches and programs. The report groups together innovative approaches and strategies into four general categories:

Service-Focused Employment Preparation

Key elements of this approach include a comprehensive assessment of barriers to employment, a strong case management component that regularly monitors and updates short-term and long-term goals, partnerships with other public and community-based organizations, and a consistent focus on employment and financial gains as goals.

Employment-Based Experience

These approaches focus on strengthening job skills and work behaviors by providing short-term work experience through subsidized employment, transitional jobs or quality temporary or temp-to-perm positions. The employment experiences are integrated with job readiness, education and skill-building components as well as the support of job coaches or mentors.

Individual Skill Development

Designed to increase individuals' technical and job readiness skills, these approaches include links to credit-bearing or certificate programs, internships or apprenticeships in a relevant field, contextualized learning strategies that focus on instruction in the context of a particular sector and structured career ladder programs within a company or industry that have a clearly defined map of jobs, requirements and training courses.

Income and Work Supports

These approaches provide assistance in helping working families maintain employment. They include post-employment assistance programs that help new workers access tax credit and child care assistance, personal career and financial counseling, financial incentives that encourage continued employment and asset-building strategies to help individuals build financial reserves.

The Urban Institute Research Review also notes other trends across the programs studied. They found that many innovative programs combine elements of several approaches listed above. In doing so, they often involve partnerships with multiple, public- and private-sector organizations that may not have collaborated in the past. This work is supported by multiple public and private sector funding streams, with significant energy spent by program administrators to develop the level of resources needed. As they continue with stronger support from the private sector than in the past, they are becoming more focused on employer needs to improve skills training that leads to higher-quality jobs. Critical to their success is a strong case management component to address personal issues and plan for future activities.

IMPROVING RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) Policy Brief *"Built to Last: Why Skills Matter for Long-Run Success in Welfare Reform"* (2003) cites earlier research findings on the experiences of welfare recipients in the labor market. It notes a number of factors that are linked to positive employment retention and advancement:

- Integrating job search, quality skills training and employment-focused basic education.
- Initial placement in jobs with relatively high wages and in occupations not related to sales.
- Supporting participants to work steadily in their initial placement.
- Having a formal system of child care in place (as opposed to child care provided by friends or family).
- Allowing low follow-up caseload size to enable frequent contact after initial placement.
- Leveraging flexible staff schedules to make contacts.
- Making skills upgrade training accessible to meet working parents' needs.
- Promoting access to supportive services and income supports.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS TO ENHANCE OUTCOMES

The Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative demonstration "Courses to Employment: Sectoral Approaches to Community College/Non-Profit Partnerships" (2009 Update) looks at ways to keep participants engaged in long-term relationships with nonprofit programs after participants have completed training and are enrolled in higher education in order to advance in their employment. It notes several strategies used by organizations in the AspenWSI project to keep participants engaged. These include:

- Post-employment financial literacy classes and assistance with Earned Income Tax Credits and child care.
- Use of short-term certificate classes as next steps for participants.
- Collaboration with networks of professional volunteers to provide mentors.
- Alumni engagement in activities that allow them to "give back" as mentors, tutors, advisors or speakers on behalf of the organization.
- Use of online social networking sites.

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE APPROACHES

Public/Private Ventures' Benchmarking Project has collected aggregate participant and outcome information from 250 programs operated by 174 organizations across the U.S. For this particular data sample, significant positive effects on job placement or retention are seen for programs that have the following characteristics, among others:

- Programs where 75 percent or more participants receive vocational training toward a certification.
- Programs where 75 percent or more participants participate in an internship.
- Programs where 75 percent or more participants receive post-employment services (beyond verification phone calls).
- Programs with pre-employment services lasting four or more weeks.
- Programs with an overall participant/staff FTE ratio of 30 or less.

From Research to Practice—Learnings from Practitioners

Various types of research are continuing to inform the field about effective retention strategies.

Meanwhile, practitioners on the ground are applying these research learnings and evaluating “what works” in their own particular setting.

In doing so, practical themes and common guidelines are emerging in programs with strong job placement and retention results. Below are some of these guidelines along with questions for individual programs to consider that have been documented in several publications by Public/Private Ventures*.

- 1.** Retention begins “Day One,” and every staff member plays a role. From the receptionist to the case manager to the job readiness instructor and job developer, everyone needs to send the same message to participants that long-term job retention (not just getting a job) is the goal.

CONSIDER:

 - Does every staff member know your program’s job retention goals and results?
 - How does your program staff describe the program’s goals to prospective participants?
 - What kind of “expectation” does staff create about the specific length of participants’ relationship with the program? Is it long-term, with program completion and getting a job just some of the steps?
- 2.** Focus on “quality jobs” in industries that are growing and that have clear career paths. Build relationships with employers that have demonstrated that they support the development and advancement of their employees.

CONSIDER:

 - What data do you have about employers’ “track record” with your participants? How long do participants stay employed? What do participants tell you about their jobs?
 - What does labor market information in your city tell you about long-term job prospects in various industries and occupations? How do you use that information in targeting employers?
- 3.** Develop strong relationships with employers. Spend time in their environment understanding their particular needs and challenges. Identify the added value you can bring to their situation, including services beyond traditional job matching (e.g., assistance with English language skills for new employees). Engage employers as much as possible in giving feedback on your services, your referrals and your curriculum. Involve them as volunteers to do presentations and mock interviews for participants. Do what you say you will do. Under-promise and over-deliver!

CONSIDER:

 - When communicating with employers, how much do you focus on the “value add” your services can bring to their situation (as opposed to your mission to help your participants find jobs)?
 - Are you frequently onsite to get a feel for specific employers’ environment and needs?
 - Are you regularly present at meetings of human resource professionals or trade associations so that you understand what’s happening in their industry and how you could be a good partner?
 - How many employers are actively engaged with you—i.e., they call you about openings or needs, they interview your referrals, they provide volunteers, etc.? How could you increase that number?
 - Are you regularly getting “customer satisfaction” feedback from your employers and sharing that with staff?

4. Develop strong relationships with participants. Participants need to trust that you understand their interests, strengths and motivations and that you have their best interests in mind. It's important that someone on your staff spend enough time interacting with participants to establish a "connection" that will help them through the difficult challenges of seeking and maintaining employment. It's equally important to support their bonding with peers in their participant group from whom they can get valuable advice and support.

CONSIDER:

- How well do you understand participants' specific strengths as well as issues that could affect their job retention?
- How well do you understand participants' long-term vision and what motivates them to "hang in" when they face challenges? Do you understand who their personal support base is (and who it isn't)?
- How well are your participants connected with others who can also provide support and advice?

5. Agree as a staff on what it means to be "job ready." Balancing the needs of employer and participant customers is a challenging task, but a key to success is agreeing on the criteria for designating a participant as "job search ready." Designate the data or tools that will be used to monitor progress toward job readiness. Regularly share information about specific employer expectations and issues participants face in becoming job ready.

CONSIDER:

- In what ways does staff track participants' progress toward job readiness? Is there agreement between job developers, case managers and instructors about what job readiness looks like and what should be done when someone isn't there yet?
- What kind of feedback do you get from employers about job candidates you refer or participants they hire? Is that feedback shared and discussed with other staff?
- What opportunities do job developers, case managers and instructors have to discuss specific participants' job readiness? How does your database help in tracking that information?

6. Build in opportunities for participants to demonstrate work readiness. Work simulations, internships and other experiences where participants can interact directly with professionals and employers give participants an opportunity to build skills and self-confidence and problem solve particular issues. Provide evaluation tools and checklists that will help both staff and participants track progress toward job readiness and get needed feedback or coaching.

CONSIDER:

- What expectations do you set and enforce around participant attendance and punctuality for sessions or appointments?
- How else do you establish a "culture of the workplace" within your own program, in terms of expectations about dress, language, interpersonal communications and work quality?
- How do you give participants an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to work in teams, handle conflict, meet deadlines, etc?
- What kind of internships or other "transitional work" opportunities can you arrange to give participants more hands-on experience?

7. Make sure it's a "good job match." Ensure that participants are referred for jobs that are a "good match" with the employer's needs in terms of participants' skills, attributes, career interests and work styles as well as the job's location, time demands, type of supervision and growth opportunities.

CONSIDER:

- Do you know what percentage of your referrals for job openings actually get an interview? Do you know the reasons that some don't? What might be the issues related to a good job "match"?
- Do you do an adequate job of helping participants identify career and job interests that are a good match for their skills and strengths? Are your job referrals "in sync" with those interests?

8. Help participants plan for the "transition." For some participants, landing a new job will bring a whole new set of physical, mental, emotional and financial demands on them and their families. Think through with them what those new demands will be and what practical steps will help to address them.

CONSIDER:

- Does the participant have a realistic budget for the amount of income they'll bring in? Where could you connect them with additional income supports or assistance (e.g., clothing or utility assistance) to make it through the first months on the job?
- How will the participant handle child care and transportation needs to make it on time to their job? What will be the back-up plans?
- What changes will the participant and their family need to make in terms of their schedules? What will be their time management challenges?
- Does the participant understand any special requirements of the first few "probationary" months on the job?

9. Implement an intentional "follow-up" plan to contact both the participant and their employer (if appropriate) during the first week, the first month and regularly for at least six months. Agree ahead of time how and when you will communicate.

CONSIDER:

- Are you flexible in terms of the schedule for follow-up, willing to contact participants outside of their (and your) normal work hours?
- When having follow-up conversations do you ask "open ended" questions that will better get at how things are going on the job? Questions could include topics such as what they like about their job, supervisor or co-workers, what some of the challenges have been, if they've had to be absent or late and why, etc.
- Do you celebrate small successes for your participant (e.g., their first month or three months on the job) with a note or other acknowledgement?

10. Provide “value add” reasons for participants to stay in touch after employment, including financial incentives, transportation passes or gift cards, awards and recognition, useful workshops and peer support groups. Ask past participants to be part of an advisory group to provide input and help with planning.

CONSIDER:

- Would gift cards help as an incentive for participants to let you know about their retention accomplishments?
- What topics for speakers or workshops could help participants thrive in their new jobs—financial management? Home/work-life balance? Additional software training?
- What kind of “family friendly” events (child care provided) would allow participants to reconnect with their peers, share learnings and advice and become motivated to stay or advance on the job?

11. Use job retention “problems” as an opportunity to help participants learn from their experience and to have useful communication with the employer that could deepen the long-term relationship.

CONSIDER:

- Do you have a good sense from both employer and participant sides about why a job match didn’t work? Are there trends in that information that could inform how you’re providing services or doing job placement?
- Does your staff seize the “teachable moment” to help participants reflect on what they have learned from their experience and what they might do differently in the future?
- Is there an opportunity to deepen your relationship with an employer that is having retention issues by providing ideas on ways to smooth the transition for new employees?

12. Work “smart” with your limited resources. Focus on the employers most likely to be a good match and the participants most likely to benefit at the present time from the particular services you have to offer. Identify and partner with community agencies or volunteers that can provide additional resources to address other challenges you may be less equipped to handle.

CONSIDER:

- Do you have a way to rank or prioritize participants in terms of their readiness for work or their readiness to accomplish your training goals?
- Do you have partnerships that can help you address issues beyond your program’s focus?

13. Use your data as a tool to support all of the above: tracking results with various employers and participants, monitoring follow-up dates, etc.

CONSIDER:

- Can your data tell you the history of your relationships with various employers, i.e., who they’ve interviewed or hired, what the results were, what their particular needs are, the relationships you have with the employer’s staff, etc.?
- How can your data about participants’ skills and interests help you make the best match with employer openings?
- How can your data help remind you of dates for follow-up that’s needed with participants and employers?
- What can your data tell you about the success rates of different job developers or participants who work with a particular case manager or instructor? How can that information help staff learn about effective practices that certain staff are using?

Integrating the Research

We encourage you to incorporate this research and these recommendations into your programs. In doing so, work to align them to the needs of your consumers and employer partners while keeping the lines of communication open and seeking recommendations from both groups on ways to improve effectiveness. Further, reach out to others in the IAJVS network to learn about the successes and challenges they faced during implementation.

Find contact information for all IAJVS affiliates on our website at www.iajvs.org.



Findings from the Field:

JVS San Francisco and JVS Boston are two IAJVS affiliates that have established effective placement and retention programs. Read about what's working for them and how you can borrow from their approaches to establish programs that will work for you.

JVS San Francisco

“TECHNOLOGY AND CONNECTIONS” AS RETENTION STRATEGIES

JVS San Francisco assists nearly 5,000 people a year with job searches, and the agency works with employers in many of the high-growth industries in the Bay Area including the healthcare, business services, nonprofit, and green job sectors. For years JVS has used data as a primary tool to gauge whether the agency is accomplishing its goal of helping people achieve self-sufficiency through employment. The agency sets goals and collects data on participant skill gains, educational attainment, internships, subsidized employment, job placement and retention to make sure program services are effective.

What has helped JVS San Francisco strengthen its job retention efforts? Several factors have made a difference, says Emylene Aspilla, Director of Programs. It starts with accountability throughout the organization. JVS San Francisco has clear retention goals as an agency, built with the input of all departments, and every individual knows their expected contribution. This commitment is driven by the agency's executive leadership, says Emylene, because knowing we have excellent results is important for us as an agency, for our funders and finally for the workforce development field as a whole.

Other factors that have made a difference:

Using technology to better support retention follow-up and employer engagement.

While it's important to set agency-wide goals for retention, it all comes down to day-to-day implementation by individual staff. When conversations at the staff level made it clear how hard it was for staff to keep track of the large numbers of placed participants needing follow-up, the decision was made to find a different data system (in this case, Salesforce) that could provide regular reminders for staff on important follow-up dates. Managers can also see the status of retention updates by their staff as well as overall retention trends. The same system is much better able to give staff a full picture of the relationship the agency has with particular employers, including who they have hired, what agency activities they have been involved in and what their particular needs are.

Multiple groups and cohorts to build “connection.”

Knowing that job search and making it through the first few months on a job are particularly challenging, JVS offers more than 60 workshops a month that bring participants together and build a stronger sense of community with other participants and staff. Many JVS staff make time to conduct a two-hour workshop each week, helping to spread the workload. Job search groups focused on particular sectors or population groups also help to build a bond between participants and the agency.

Keeping the “connection” strong.

JVS uses LinkedIn, frequent email blasts, cohort reunions, newsletter updates that highlight success stories and frequent invitations to events to keep participants engaged and connected.

JVS Boston

“EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIP” AS A RETENTION STRATEGY

JVS Boston has positioned itself as a major partner and resource for employers in Boston’s large healthcare sector—a strategy that has helped the agency increase its job placement and retention rates. This strategy has also helped JVS increase its overall revenue as funding available from government and philanthropic sources becomes tighter. JVS services included the usual education and skills training for jobseekers at the JVS site, internships with local businesses and job placement and retention assistance. But for almost a decade JVS has also offered incumbent worker training and career advancement services at the employer worksite, including 12 partnerships in the healthcare area. Onsite services include GED, English as a Second Language and computer training for employees as well as tutoring and coaching to help employees prepare for college-level work on healthcare certifications.

How did they get started on this path? What are some of the keys to success? Kira Khazatsky, Director of Healthcare Partnerships, thinks there are several:

Focusing all staff on serving the “dual customer.”

While this approach represents a paradigm shift that is much harder to operationalize than talk about, Kira stresses that the commitment to both employer and participant customers has to come from top leadership, and then has to be evident in every person that is hired by the agency. Hiring the right people is a difficult challenge: they must be passionate about the agency’s mission but also willing to “schmooze” with employers enough to build strong relationships and become a trusted partner.

Getting to know your employer organizations better than you know your own.

Like developing any relationship, this takes time and lots of meetings with key individuals at multiple levels of the business, tours of departments, job shadowing, etc. It’s important to understand what the organization views as its unique strengths and what challenges they face internally and externally—and how addressing the training needs of entry-level employees could help them meet those challenges.

Seeing government grants as “seed money” for long-term employer-supported partnerships.

When JVS decided it wanted to pursue incumbent worker training as a long-term strategy for building its employer relationships, it saw the availability of government grants from the Department of Education as an opportunity to get its foot in the door by offering ESOL training. With the assistance of introductions from the JVS Board of Directors, JVS staff approached employers with whom they already had a good track record of success through the JVS pre-employment program.

JVS made this proposal to their employers: we have funds we can bring to the table to help you strengthen the language skills of your entry-level employees. We would like you to communicate with us about your experience and continually assess if we are meeting your needs. If this proves to be a useful service, we want you to then consider putting aside resources to continue this service once the government funding has ended.

As Kira says, this is hard work, but in the end JVS is building the skills of far more people by working through employers than the agency would have been able to do simply by offering services to jobseekers. Where employers may once have supported JVS as a way of “doing good” in the community, they now view JVS as an important business partner as well.

Technology and personal relationships represent different ends of the spectrum. We encourage you to find balance between the two and to build programs that are based on the needs of your consumers and employer partners as well as the capabilities of your staff and organization.

IAJVS Affiliates Putting Ideas to Work: Promising Practices

Based on discussions with their peers and speakers at the 2009 and 2010 Retention Strategies Forums, IAJVS affiliates are focusing their efforts in five strategic areas to improve job retention results.

FIVE STRATEGIC AREAS TO IMPROVE JOB RETENTION RESULTS

1

DEEPENING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

2

BETTER ASSESSING
PARTICIPANT JOB READINESS

3

BUILDING A STRONGER “COMMUNITY”
AMONG PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF

4

MORE SYSTEMATIC
PARTICIPANT FOLLOW-UP

5

BETTER INTEGRATION AND
ALIGNMENT OF STAFF EFFORTS

Implementing the Practices

Below are some “Promising Practice” examples demonstrating ways IAJVS affiliates are working to implement these strategies.

STRATEGY 1: Deepening Employer Engagement

Workforce development programs with high job retention results understand that they serve a “dual customer,” and that understanding and meeting employer needs is essential to success for their program participants. When an employer’s relationship with a workforce program is seen as a “partnership” that offers valuable benefits to both—and not as a “social responsibility” to help unemployed participants—the chances of making a job match that works are vastly improved. As in any partnership, it’s all about building a win/win relationship.

Hiring Employer-Focused Staff

JVS Los Angeles is hiring “account executives” with experience in the staffing industry. These staff members bring a keen understanding of employer needs and focus on making sure that program referrals meet those needs. This has helped JVS Los Angeles to have one of the best employment and retention rates in the city. Similarly, JVS Chicago has established an Employer Services Team specifically devoted to developing employer relationships. The team meets regularly with both staff and persons served to share pertinent information.

Onsite Employer “Prescreening” Events

JEVS Human Services Philadelphia is holding four to six employer events per month targeted at companies with higher potential salaries or growth opportunities. Employers use the event to provide an orientation about their organizations’ needs and assess the “fit” with potential applicants. It’s a win/win that provides a resource for employers and ensures better job matches.

Business Volunteers as Trainers and Coaches

JVS Los Angeles utilizes bankers, corporate trainers and human resource managers from area companies to provide critical advice to jobseekers as speakers. Likewise, Jewish Community Service of South Florida is implementing a “speed resume review night” that involves local employer representatives.

Greater Specificity in Job Descriptions

Jewish Family and Career Services Atlanta focuses on getting as thorough a job description as possible for any opening and then a complete review of it with the jobseeker. After each interview they follow up with both jobseeker and employers to gain more information about the position, so that there’s no misunderstanding about work responsibilities or environment, and to confirm salary, so there’s no misunderstanding or waste of either the jobseeker’s or employer’s time. This helps ensure a good, appropriate hire.

Offering Online Job Matching

Jewish Community Service of South Florida has launched the ParnossahWorks software program (created by F·E·G·S Health and Human Services System New York) that links employer job openings with appropriate applicants. Combined with the addition of a business development staffperson they are quickly gaining new employer clients and job postings.

Offering Informational Resources

Agence Ometz in Montreal has created a free 40-minute educational presentation that offers employers information on how to manage employees on the job who may have a mental illness and/or learning or intellectual disability.

Things to Consider:

- Initiating or enhancing conversations with employers to assess needs for onsite training that would help develop the skills of entry-level employees.
- Targeting a specific industry sector for intensive relationship building.
- Refocusing the job development team on “account management” to ensure employer relationships are well cared for.
- Hiring a paid job developer if you don’t already have one.
- Getting employers onsite every week to speak with staff and/or participants (which increases their investment in your agency).
- Using social networking (e.g., LinkedIn) as a tool for employer engagement.

STRATEGY 2: Better Assessing and Developing Participants’ Job Readiness

An essential part of making a good “match” between employer and jobseeker is having systems in place to assess and improve participants’ readiness for work before they are referred for job placement. Without these kinds of systems, issues that could hinder job retention will not be addressed, employer relationships will be damaged and participants’ self-confidence about their employability will be dampened. It’s critical for programs to provide a variety of opportunities for participants to demonstrate their skills and job readiness.

Mock Work Environments

JVS Boston is able to “pre-train” their Project with Industries (PWI) participants using the CVS drug store Learning Center with equipment that is onsite at JVS. Individual PWI Employment Specialists provide hands-on, self-paced training to help participants be better prepared for photo lab, pharmacy and cashier positions. This simulation builds participants’ self-confidence and job readiness while helping staff

identify problems that need attention. Similarly, Shalom Denver uses its light warehouse and bulk mail setting to gauge participants’ ability to demonstrate a good work ethic, understand employer expectations, function in a team setting and juggle home and work priorities.

Transferable Work Style Behavioral Assessment

JVS Detroit’s Rehab Services program has designed a structured observation form to rate the effectiveness of a consumer’s behavioral competencies as they carry out written and pictorial instructions to complete a typical work task, e.g. assembling a shelf.

Job Readiness Checklists and Questionnaires

IAJVS affiliates in Baltimore and Louisville are both using intensive assessments and checklists to identify areas of strength and participant needs for improvement before referrals for employment. For clients with disabilities, the Jewish Community Services Baltimore’s more intensive assessment includes the client’s career assessments, psychological evaluations, service plan to determine job readiness, accommodations and supports the client might need.

ABC Ranking of Clients for Job Search Readiness

JEVS Human Services Philadelphia has developed an A-B-C rating system for all new TANF clients, with the understanding that only those with an “A” rating will be able to work with the job developer on referrals. Orientation and work readiness instructors as well as case managers share in the rating of clients and work together to move clients to an “A” status. This helps ensure that the needs of employer accounts are better met.

ASD Coaching Pilot Project

JVS Toronto’s Disability Services has completed a successful pilot project with clients who have Asperger’s syndrome. The project included a pre- and post-evaluation tool to measure individual advancement, pre-vocational training with peer support, job development, placement and individualized job coaching.

Coaching Participants on Supervisory Relationships

Israel Elwyn coaches participants on using basic communication skills that can help them develop and maintain a better relationship with their supervisor on the job. Staff focus on getting participants to reach out to their supervisors regularly, make good eye contact, inform supervisors about positive things happening in the workplace, and avoid complaining! The key is giving straight-forward feedback to participants in a supporting environment.

Things to Consider:

- Making sure that every component of your program is seen as a way to demonstrate and evaluate job readiness.
- Making sure there is agreement by staff on what “job ready” looks like and how it will be evaluated throughout the program.
- Reinforcing what “job ready” means through a variety of tools and assessments for participants – including self-assessments.

STRATEGY 3: Building a Stronger Sense of “Community” with Participants

Achieving high job retention results is very much about relationships—with employers and with participants. In programs where participants have the opportunity to share experiences and develop strong connections with staff and fellow participants, they are more likely to feel like they have the motivational support they need to tackle the difficult tasks of finding and keeping a job. They are also more likely to feel a sense of ownership or loyalty to the organization and their peer group, understanding that their good performance on the job helps strengthen the possibility of greater opportunities for other jobseekers in the future.

Use of Social Media

JVS Cincinnati has set up a Cincinnati Career Network group using the LinkedIn network to connect almost 200 program participants, employers and recruiters. It has helped the organization’s ability to stay in touch with participants about openings, job changes, promotions, training opportunities and other resources. Training participants on how to use LinkedIn has also enhanced their own professional development skills.

Annual Recognitions

JVS MetroWest’s Caregiving Companions’ program in New Jersey sends a congratulatory letter, certificate of appreciation and a small gift to recognize a year on the job, presented at a recognition ceremony. In a similar approach that can be used for employees or program participants, JVS Cincinnati offers fun appreciation gifts like a “Girl Scout survival bag” to help sustain motivation during demanding times.

Things to Consider:

- Revised agreements with participants about what they can expect from you and what you expect from them.
- Providing a program of career planning for participants in temporary or stable entry-level jobs
- Using successful participants as mentors.

STRATEGY 4: More Systematic Follow-Up After Placement

Programs with high retention rates understand that for some participants who may have little prior work experience it is important to invest staff resources in regular personal follow-up during the first several months on the job. Not everyone will need this type of assistance, but for some it makes the difference between keeping and losing the job.

Weekly Follow-Up for the First 90 Days

For participants in JVS Los Angeles' BankWorks program, their job as a bank teller may be their first exposure to the challenges of the professional workplace. JVS staff phone or email clients weekly during the first 90 days to see how the new job is going and to offer coaching assistance as needed around customer service issues, working with co-workers and establishing a good relationship with the supervisor. After 90 days the outreach slows to once per month, and retention results at six months have been significantly higher than the typical new hire

experience for JVS' partner banks. JVS staff note that the follow-up takes discipline and perseverance, but that it's worth it!

Things to Consider:

- Clear expectations for staff about regular and frequent follow-up, with a "tickler" system to provide reminders and documentation of contact results.
- Making sure that follow-up involved questions that will get at how the job is really going and where issues need to be addressed.

STRATEGY 5: Integration of Staff Team Efforts

Every staff member of the team wants program participants to get and keep a good job. But programs with strong job retention results are equally focused on meeting the needs of their employer customer. Different staff members play different roles—some more focused on the participant's skills and job readiness, others more on the needs of employers. But it's important that there be frequent communication and collaboration between staff in their various roles so that the needs of both customers are met.

Increased Communication Between Staff in Different Functions.

F-E-G-S Health and Human Services System New York has focused on increasing the collaboration and communication of their Job Development units (focused on the employer) and their Job Retention units (focused on participant follow-up). While in the past these units worked independently from one another, F-E-G-S has set up systems that allow better sharing of information between them. Joint trainings and team building exercises have helped as well.

Things to Consider:

- Cross training of staff to do workshops.
- More joint meetings of staff to discuss overall results, team accomplishments and factors possibly affecting success.
- Training of counselors regarding ways to help participants strengthen their "soft skills."
- Increased communication between case managers and employment specialists.

Resources

Used as part of the Train-the-Trainer Retention Strategies Forums:

Research Resources

Dworak, Linda with Maureen Conway and Allison Gerber, 2009. *Beyond Graduation: Promoting Post-Program Engagement and Advancement*. The Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative.

Maguire, Sheila, Joshua Freely, Carol Clymer, Maureen Conway and Deena Schwartz, 2010. *Tuning In to Local Labor Markets: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study*. Public/Private Ventures.

Martinson, Karin and Pamela Holcomb, 2007. *Innovative Employment Approaches and Programs for Low-Income Families*. Urban Institute.

Martinson, Karin and Julie Strawn, 2003. *Built to Last: Why Skills Matter in Welfare Reform*. Center for Law and Social Policy.

Guidebooks and Other Resources

Clymer, Carol and Laura Wyckoff, 2003. *Employment Retention Essentials: Building a Retention-Focused Organization*. Public/Private Ventures.

Clymer, Carol and Laura Wyckoff, 2007. *Here to Stay: Tips and Tools to Hire, Retain and Advance Hourly-Wage Workers*. Public/Private Ventures.

Wyckoff, Laura and Carol Clymer, 2005. *Job Development Essentials: A Guide for Job Developers, 2nd edition*. Public/Private Ventures.

The Benchmarking Project provides workforce development practitioners, funders and policy makers with data to inform expectations about job placement and job retention outcomes and some of the factors affecting that performance. For more information about the project and to learn how to get involved, visit the Public/Private Ventures website at www.ppv.org.

Acknowledgements

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A special thank you goes to Martha Miles, who conducted the Forums both years with our staff. As Senior Program Director of Public/Private Ventures, a national research and policy organization focusing on effective practices in social programs, Ms. Miles is the author of the recently published P/PV report, *Good Stories Aren’t Enough: Becoming Outcomes-Driven in Workforce Development*. She also assisted with the design and implementation of P/PV’s curriculum *Working with Employers: Skills and Strategies for Job Development Success*. Ms. Miles has leadership roles in P/PV’s national Performance Benchmarking project and in P/PV’s Working Ventures initiative, which facilitates learning about effective workforce development practices through reports, workshops, learning communities, and useful tools for practitioners. Ms. Miles has more than 25 years of workforce development experience, including roles as executive director, job developer and trainer with Training, Inc., a successful network of community-based workforce development programs. As Director of the Training, Inc. National Association, she focused on helping affiliate programs strengthen results by building stronger employer relationships, improving jobseekers’ soft skills by integrating the culture of work into training, and using data to improve performance.

We also thank the 35 workforce specialists and their executive directors who lent their time to this project, participating in numerous follow-up questionnaires, conference calls, and individual follow-up sessions. We thank the employers who participated in dialogue with our network to identify new strategies to better meet the employment needs of both employers and employees.

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Genie Cohen

Chief Executive Officer

International Association of Jewish Vocational Services

About IAJVS

International Association of Jewish Vocational Services (IAJVS) is a not-for-profit association of 28 health and human service agencies in the United States, Canada, and Israel that provide a wide range of vocational and rehabilitation services. Through our member agencies, we improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals each year by providing access to a vast array of services including career management, skills training, rehabilitation, mental health and health services.

To build local capacity and set the example for socially responsible leadership, we research private, corporate and government funding opportunities for our affiliates; provide executive and professional development through annual conferences, executive leadership forums, teleconferences, and train-the-trainer institutes; and act as a clearinghouse for shared information and "best practices."

IAJVS serves as the collective voice, representing the network nationally and internationally and promoting the important work of its local agencies here and abroad. Together, we serve more than 500,000 individuals annually and continue to carry out the original mission set forth by the medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides—the greatest charity lies in helping people to become self-sufficient. www.iajvs.org.

IAJVS Member Agencies

- Jewish Family and Career Services, Atlanta, GA
- Jewish Community Services, Baltimore, MD
- Jewish Vocational Service, Boston, MA
- Jewish Vocational Service, Chicago, IL
- Jewish Vocational Service, Cincinnati, OH
- Jewish Family Service Association, Cleveland, OH
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