

Level 1 Stakeholder Script

Talking to Employers About Your Program and the RETAIN Project

Note: This document is intended to provide you with sample answers to commonly asked questions that employers may ask about your RETAIN project. As you review the document, please keep in mind that:

- Several answers may need to be customized based on the specific parameters of your project.
- This is not designed to be a verbatim script—you may not need to share all of the content outlined in this document. Rather, it is meant to address common questions you may hear from potential employer audiences. You can pick and choose from the messages outlined below, and customize your responses based on the cues and specifics you are hearing in your conversations.
- This is considered a “Level 1” script that addresses questions about RETAIN and your research study at large; specific messaging related to specific interventions, workplace solutions, etc. can be addressed in a “Level 2” series of scripts customized for your project.
- You may need to edit language in order to match terminology outlined in your Informed Consent Agreement. Certain descriptions should replicate the language in those forms.

The RETAIN technical assistance (TA) team looks forward to hearing how this document is serving you as you begin putting it into practice. If there are additional questions you would like to add to this sample script, or inquiries you need help answering, please let us know by contacting your AIR RETAIN liaison.

What is [State Project Name]?

- [State Project Name] is a **new (and free) grant-funded program that helps workers who are out of work due to a new or worsened health problem**. Our goal is to **get these workers back on the job promptly and safely**.
- The program will **open the lines of communication** between doctors and employers to enable injured and ill employees to return to work more rapidly. Our expert coordinators can often suggest solutions to common problems that can needlessly prolong work absence and lead to job loss for workers—not to mention unnecessary turnover for employers like you.
- So, we're here to provide employers with timely and expert assistance with the stay-at-work (SAW) and return-to-work (RTW) process—strategies that can:
 - **Help you minimize workplace disruption and retain valuable employees—all while saving your business [or organization] time, money, and effort.**
 - **Help your worker(s) feel better and get back to work sooner** so that they make the best possible recovery and maintain their personal well-being and financial stability, and
 - **Help our community keep our workers employed and financially self-sustaining** instead of dependent on disability income programs.
- To do this, [State Project Name] **offers our services as a trusted intermediary to you, your workers, and to their treating health care professionals**.
- There are a few things you should know about our program:
 - First, it is **voluntary** for the worker, employer, treating provider, and any other involved party such as an insurer. We presume each party has an interest in helping workers get everyday life back on track—which includes doing their jobs.
 - We are **outcome-focused**. The success (and continued funding) of our program depends on earning the trust of and producing satisfactory results for employers, workers, and their treating health care professionals. So, we're very focused on getting you results.
 - Finally, we **carefully protect medical and other personal information** in compliance with state and federal privacy laws.

Why are you contacting me today?

- [Option 1]: **One of your employees who recently became ill/injured is a candidate for [or client of] our program**, and I want to talk with you about what that means. [Go on to explain next steps. Please note that you may only divulge this if the individual provides their consent that you may talk to their employer.]
- [Option 2]: We are **currently seeking referrals for our program**, so we are wondering if you have any recently injured or ill employees who might be candidates for [State Project Name] services. [Explain eligibility requirements and next steps.]
- [Option 3]: Part of our program involves finding new job opportunities for experienced workers whose previous employer could not accommodate a specific new functional limitation. **Do you have any job openings or skills needs that we might be able to help you fill?** We'd love to partner with you and find you some skilled employees who want to work.

What do you do for an injured or ill worker once you receive a referral?

- First, we must **determine eligibility** for our services and invite the worker to participate. Our goal is to get involved early and make a difference quickly. The parameters of our project dictate that **[Note: States can customize this section as necessary based on when your project plans to serve participants. For example “...we can start delivering services after the second week of work absence but cannot continue beyond the sixth-month mark.”]** But, workers with problems outside our scope are counseled and referred elsewhere.
- Next, we **orient the worker to the program and obtain their consent** to release data (following privacy protocols, of course) about them and the services we provide on their behalf to the funder as required by the grant.
- Then, we really get started. **We help the worker lay out a step-by-step path to recovery and return to work.** We clarify the nature of any specific obstacles, and we come up with a plan and a timeline for resolving them, which may be revised as events unfold. The worker may then share any or all of this plan with other parties.
- With the worker’s permission, we **expedite the exchange of needed information** among the parties about such things as current work capacity, medical restrictions, and potential solutions (such as problem-solving meetings, temporary adjustments to work schedules or tasks; specialty tools or equipment; long-term reasonable accommodations to jobs, etc.).
- When necessary and possible, **we coordinate the services of others to resolve those obstacles.**
- **As I mentioned, there is no cost for our services.** We count on your cooperation, but our experts will do the heavy lifting. We’ll work collaboratively with you, your injured and ill worker(s), and their health care provider to find a solution that works for your employee and your business **[or organization]**.

As an employer, what is my role in this situation?

- When one of your employees is too sick or injured to work, **your support can play a surprisingly big role in the eventual outcome of their predicament.**
- **Feeling supported by others** definitely strengthens people’s motivation to do the hard work that recovery sometimes requires. Feeling neglected or abandoned does the opposite. Feeling safe and productive while returning gradually to activity builds confidence and speeds healing. And positive support from supervisors and co-workers can really influence how things go—and promote the smooth operation of your business/organization.
- When faced with one of these worker situations, we hope you will:
 - **Maintain a human connection** and provide encouragement to your worker(s) during their recuperation;
 - **Make temporary adjustments** whenever possible so they can keep contributing while they regain their capabilities;
 - **Consider ways to accommodate** long-term impairments as required by law; and
 - **Support your worker(s)** during the early period when they have just re-entered the workplace.

Why are SAW/RTW practices good for business, and how will I benefit from participating?

- For employers like you, the return on investment of SAW/RTW comes from **strengthening employee engagement, retaining talent, and reducing disruption and lost productivity**, all of which boils down to **saving money—or making more of it**.
- Because when workers have to leave your business due to illness or injury, **it affects your workplace and your bottom line**.
- You know better than anyone that it's expensive to hire, train, and onboard a replacement for someone who leaves your workforce. And it takes a long time for those new employees to become efficient at their job.
- So, it really makes **good business sense to keep trained and experienced employees working** when feasible. And our program will help you do just that.
- In return for participating in [State Project Name], you and your business/organization will:
 - **Save money** by not having to recruit, hire, and train a replacement.
 - Learn about strategies and accommodations that can **help your employees work more efficiently**.
 - Demonstrate your commitment to the **health and well-being** of your employees in a concrete and highly visible way.
 - And gain the satisfaction that comes from **retaining your valuable employee(s) and helping them stay financially stable**. After all, when someone has to leave the workforce after getting hurt or sick, it can be detrimental to their families, their finances, and their future. When they can stay in the workforce, everyone wins—including you.

What's involved in participating in [State Project Name]?

- When you join our project, we'll help your injured and ill employee(s) return to work as soon as it's medically feasible—for the benefit of the worker, as well as your business [or organization].
- **You'll work with our RTW Coordinator** to guide you and oversee the process. It's their job to:
 - Coordinate with you and the worker's health care provider and help develop their customized RTW plan.
 - Help your employee through the recovery and rehabilitation process.
 - Assist you in helping your employee succeed on the job once they return.
 - And identify and implement any workplace accommodations your employee may need to effectively transition back to work.
- They can also help your staff look at your policies and procedures to see if they support employees who may become ill or injured in the future.

- [For employers who hire our clients as *new employees*:] If you agree to interview and hire one of our clients—either temporarily or permanently—you’ll be helping your business and the local economy, *and* supporting the recovery and livelihood of an injured or ill worker who needs help getting back on their feet. We’ll be there to make the process easy for you by giving you the advice you need to help that employee succeed.

What does it cost to participate in [State Project Name], and how much time will it take?

- Participation in the program is **free of charge**.
- As an employer participant, **your only investment is time**, and we estimate a very reasonable time commitment. [Insert details if time commitment estimates are known].
- As I said, we’ll be doing most of the heavy lifting, and you’ll get a lot in return by participating.

[Possible Question from Small Businesses:] **I’m a small business without a robust human resources (HR) department. Would participating in [State Project Name] be a lot of work for me?**

- We understand your concerns. **Rest assured that employers of all sizes can participate** in our program, and you are the exact type of business we want to help.
- **Your only investment is time**, and we estimate a very reasonable time commitment. [Insert details if time commitment estimates are known].
- And **small businesses may find the experience particularly helpful** since small teams are more likely to suffer from the absence of a valued team member.
- Small businesses without a lot of experience in this area will also be happy to know that our experts are there to provide you with education and guidance on SAW/RTW practices. **So, we can act as an extension of your staff.**

[Possible Question from Large Businesses:] **Our organization has a well-established Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and Workers’ Compensation process. Why should I disrupt what’s working well for us by introducing [State Project Name]?**

- That’s great to know, and please rest assured that we are here to **enhance or supplement** your current processes as needed, not compete with them or get in the way.
- Our RTW Coordinator would work closely with these functions of your organization. **We will not disrupt**, but rather work with them.

What are some typical SAW/RTW solutions you can advise me on?

- Helping people with acquired illnesses or injuries get back to work typically involves the same kinds of **common-sense strategies** that can benefit *all* workers.
- **In most cases, we're talking about a temporary adjustment to a job description or workspace.**
- Common strategies include:
 - Part-time hours.
 - Modified job duties.
 - Telecommuting.
 - Temporary re-assignment to another job.
 - And reasonable accommodations to the workstation or work location.
- And again, **it's [State Project Name]'s job to help guide you to these types of solutions.** We'll work with your employee's medical provider to identify the types of activities they can do while recovering, and also with you to figure out if there are any temporary adjustments or alternative duties they can do while getting better.

That sounds complicated and expensive. What if I can't afford these temporary adjustments or reasonable accommodations?

- Remember, **reasonable accommodations are really just "productivity tools"** that help someone do their job better—and they usually don't cost a lot to implement.
- According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), **most workplace accommodations are low cost or no cost.** JAN's annual survey of employers consistently indicates that a high percentage (59%) of accommodations cost absolutely nothing to make, while the rest have a typical cost of only \$500.

I'm worried that I won't have enough work for my employee to do in their temporary role while they recover.

- Sometimes it takes a fresh perspective to find a solution that will work for both you and the recovering employee. So, **we can talk that through with you**, and we may even be able to send someone out who is trained to assess the employee's duties and work station. That's the kind of service we offer through [State Project Name].
- **Experience tells us that we can find a mutually beneficial solution.** [Note: Look for solutions based on what they tell you. If the employer says they don't have enough work to keep the person busy for a full work week, ask if there's enough to employ them three days a week, etc.]

What do you mean when you say this program is “grant-funded”?

- [State Project Name] is **part of a grant program funded by the federal government** called RETAIN, which stands for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network.
- Led by the U.S. Department of Labor in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, it is **evaluating effective SAW/RTW strategies** that can keep people in the labor force following illness or injury.
- The government saw the need to help employers get people back to work after they get hurt or sick, and **they awarded a grant to our state to establish [State Project Name].**
- Thanks to that funding, we are improving access to SAW/RTW services and helping people stay on the job.
- **That’s why we need to collect data** as part of our service; the government is going to analyze how well our services are working here in our state and use that information to educate others on effective strategies.

How long is this RETAIN research program, and what will you do with the results?

- The pilot phase of this program will end on [date]. Between now and then, our [State Project Name] experts will provide customized services to participating employers and injured and ill workers.
- Throughout the process, we’ll be tracking results, analyzing what is and is not working, and identifying best practices and key learnings about SAW/RTW.
- Ultimately, the federal agencies behind RETAIN—the U.S. Department of Labor and Social Security Administration—will be using program data to inform future policy decisions and share best practices with employers, workers, and health care providers across the country.
- **So, by participating, you’ll have the opportunity to help your organization, your employee(s), and many others.**

Will our results and experiences be attributed to me, my employees, or my organization?

- **No.** The results of the program will be presented as grouped data. **The names of specific businesses or employees will not be publicly shared**, and special care has been taken to safeguard personally identifying information.
- However, if you are interested in tracking results for your specific business [or organization], we can discuss this with you.
- In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor is interested in identifying and profiling SAW/RTW success stories for educational purposes. So, if you’re amenable to sharing your experience with [State Project Name] in that way, we’d be happy to discuss that with you. However, that would not happen without your consent.

I think I have an employee who is a candidate for [State Program Name], but they don't trust research studies and wouldn't want to give informed consent.

- We certainly understand that some people may not feel comfortable participating in research programs or disclosing and/or discussing their health issues.
- If it's helpful, we have some background information on the program that you can share with any interested or concerned employees.
- And, if the person feels comfortable talking with us to learn more, that is also an option.
- We want to ensure a positive experience and avoid pushing anyone who does not want to participate. So, let us know how we can help.