

Community of Practice - Notes

Enhancing SAW/RTW Outcomes through Employment Engagement

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Introductions and share one key area of interest to you regarding employer engagement?

The following are some of the key areas of interests expressed by states regarding employer engagement:

- Ways to engage with networks that are already in existence and that they already have connections to. How to capture their interest and begin training with them?
Build statewide capacity within the business services team and overall workforce system.
- What outreach methods are other states are using to connect with local organizations.
Ways to get buy in from employers and to be able to effectively communicate what's in it for them, while still achieving the desired outcomes.
- Interested in engaging employers when the injury has occurred away from work. Most of their TA has been around injuries that have occurred in the workplace and how workers compensation can be used to incentivize employers. Want to go beyond that and serve workers who were hurt away from the job. How to we get employers interested in those cases?
There is a workforce shortage and they are currently outreaching to employers who are looking to retain their workers. Working with the Chamber of Commerce and looking for creative ways to do this.
- Engaging employers and working with particular skill sets.

Participants discussed engagement of employers around reasonable accommodations

- One state has a staff member who is a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and runs the Assisted Technology Center. The team consults with her when assisted accommodations could be helpful for the employee. She then goes in to conduct an assessment and work with the employer to help them with the necessary accommodations. They are currently working on their first accommodations request and it has been very well received. Trying to break down the myth that it is too expensive for employers and informing them of options that will not break the bank.
 - Group discussed their thoughts on whether one person would be able to handle reasonable accommodations for all of the employers Responses included:
 - No. Currently in the pilot phase and already have staffing concerns. [State] hoping that as they train the employers, they can build their capacity and the capacity of the return to work coordinators.
- Counting on employers to do cross pollination in terms of learning about reasonable accommodation procedures. They have a couple of in state employers who have shown success and plan to connect them with similar employers to adapt their best practices. Also trying to link

- employees who are out of work with care managers and have partnered with a primary provider group to do this.
 - Derek Shields: Should other states consider partnering employers with others who have shown success?
 - Some employers are so small that they will need to come together and learn from the larger employers. Will need to figure out how to support them in developing return to work/stay at work policies and practices.
- Have met with some larger employers who have a very robust return to work program and a full department dedicated to employers who are injured on the job. One of their HR leaders is on the Workforce Board and they often consult with her on where workforce could potentially step in to be an asset. She suggested concentrating on smaller employers for the pilot. An employer member organization and their CEO recommended concentrating on smaller employers, that don't have HR departments, for the pilot. This is where their state plans to focus their energy during the pilot recruitment process.

Partnership Connections

- [State] connects with employers through both one-to-one direct outreach and through regional networks. Their initial outreach is through the state's Employers Association so that they can scale the reach to employers. They also understand that one-to-one connections will eventually need to be made with each employer. They also utilize webinars that have specific action items after the webinar has concluded. They also connect with select employers before the webinar to see what content they would like to be addressed during the presentation. They use a blended approach and can also reach individuals based on their specific occupational network.
- Even though they are located near a metropolitan area, their project is rural. They've decided to connect with employers through local chambers of commerce. The challenge is, there are only three towns within the region that have an actual chamber of commerce.
 - Derek Shields: Recommended the Regional Chamber as a resource, which has a great Diverse by Design model.
- Plans to outreach through an intermediate network as well as through one-to-one individual outreach. Has partnered with the manufacturing association in the northeast part of the state and will be able to disseminate information through their members. Also working with the Regional Business Resource Network, which is a team of workforce and economic development partners, to conduct research and talk to employers to discover the needs of business. They use this information to create resources. Need ideas for workers who are injured at home and how to get their employers interested in return to work programs.
- On state is currently working on an infographic for injured/ill incumbent workers and their employers. It will show the value of long-term employee investment even through injury and the economic benefits through employee retention. AIR and the TA team will be providing feedback once the infographic has been developed.

Leadership

- Leadership needs to be aware that their policies are fragmented. Their diversity and inclusion teams may be actively searching for someone with a disability to join their team but at the same time they may not be trying to bring back a worker who was injured on the job. They need to realize that they are apart of the same community and engage both sides.
 - Derek Shields: Are tools and resources needed that can be used to engage leadership?

What type TA resources do you need?

The following reflects discussion and SME response around potential and needed TA resources.

- An employer readiness assessment tool that is based on size of the organization. Something that can help [employers] assess their current policies and their willingness to make the necessary changes.
 - Derek Shields: There is a partnership with The American Association of People with Disabilities which created the Disability Quality Index. Those questions could be simplified and tailored to fit return to work requirements.
- For some employers, how do you get past initial hurdles or an HR department who is not willing to share “confidential” information when you are just trying to connect with employees? Sometimes it’s difficult just to get a foot in the door. Are there tools, materials, suggestions, or ideas that can be used to breakdown these barriers? They plan to host focus groups with local businesses to see what would make this process easier for them, but this is going to take time and they would like to have this information sooner rather than later.
 - Derek Shields: Offered to provide EAP best practices.

Questions

- How can we share resources (e.g. infographics) with the TA providers and other grantees? How can we solicit feedback from our CoP partners?
 - Connect with your TA liaison and they will post the resource to the online community on your behalf.
- Employers are more inclined to work with employees that have incurred an occupational injury or illness as doing so can have a direct impact on their experience and workers’ compensation premiums. In contrast, employers are almost always reluctant to allow an employee with a non-occupational injury or illness to return to work until the employee has been release to full duty. What advice can you provide?
 - Derek: A topic to future discussion to further explore best practices.
- What type of resources or tool kits are available to assist Employment Coordinators in their conversations with employers about light duty work, workplace accommodations, SAW or RTW policies and understanding the impact of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)?
 - Derek Shields: will provide a response that will be shared with participants and posted on The ROC (the RETAIN TA Online Community)

Key Takeaways

- Participants are engaging with employers and you want more resources and tools on communications and outreach, direct engagement, roadmap templates, and a readiness tool.
- Derek Shields, Wehmah Jones, and Becky Ornelas will develop a list of resources that can be used to address some of the concerns shared by CoP participants.
- The resources and slide deck from the presentation will be posted to the online community.
- Please forward any resources that you would like to share to your TA Liaison.