

Developing Living Wage Jobs for People with ID/DD

Identify High Growth Occupations:

The starting point is to identify high growth occupations in your area. This can be done by visiting EDD's CalJobs website to search for high growth occupations in your County or by talking to City or County economic development staff. Often it is possible to identify what educational or training requirements are needed for these high growth positions.

Understanding What Skills Are Needed For High Growth Jobs:

Let's say that you've done your research on CalJobs website and you discover that personal care attendants are projected to be one of the fastest growing occupations over the next 5 years. You understand through your research that a Certified Nursing Assistant certificate may be required for some positions but not all. Based on this information, you could talk to local CNA training programs to understand whether it may be an attainable certification for the people you serve. If so, you may want to explore a partnership with a CNA training provider to help them tailor their program to people with ID/DD. You might be able to use Tailored-Day Service funding to help customize the curriculum and to provide tutoring to people you serve so they can successfully complete the program.

You may also determine that CNA certification is not attainable for many of the people you serve. In that case, you would want to focus on those personal care attendant jobs that do not require a CNA certificate. It is still important to find out what skills those jobs require and to be reasonably assured that the people you serve will be able to attain those skills with training.

It is also important to take into account other factors involved in having a successful career as a personal care attendant. For example, does an attendant need to have a car? Attendants often are required to help transfer people from their wheelchair, can the people you serve physically handle this task with training?

If the skills needed to be successful in the occupation are attainable, then you need a training partner/host employer.

Finding a Training Partner:

The best training partner/host employer organization has several features:

- The organization has a need to hire for the targeted position.
- The organization is large enough to where positions are frequently open.

- The organization values diversity in its workforce and wants to reflect that diversity to the community it serves.
- The organization values its employees by offering competitive salaries and benefits.

You may identify organizations that match these features but the next challenge is getting them interested in partnering with you to create a training program.

Getting the Training Partner/Host Employer Interested In Partnering:

This can be one of the hardest parts of the process and can be a very time consuming endeavor. Its important to do research before approaching the organization. Your research should cover the following:

- Is the organization a for-profit or non-profit organization?
- Who is in their leadership (i.e. senior leadership, Board of Directors)? What are their backgrounds? Is there a connection to disability or social justice issues among the leaders?
- Are there elected officials involved with the organization? If so, in what capacity? If an elected is involved, do they have a connection to disability or social justice?
- Is the organization unionized? If so, what is the tenor of relations with management currently? Does the union have a connection to disability? How will you make sure they will not see a training program as a threat to their members?
- Are there family members of people you serve employed with the organization? Are they in leadership positions?

Initially you might be connecting with human resources representatives of the organization. HR may or may not have the authority to decide to partner with you. If HR does not have the authority to make that decision, eventually you want to be connected to the leaders in the organization that have that authority. Getting in front of an organization's leadership can be difficult if HR will not be helpful. In this case, finding elected officials connected to the organization, willing to help you can be beneficial. At times, enlisting labor unions to help you connect with leadership can be effective.

If your organization does not have prior experience in developing training programs with large employers, you may want to partner with a workforce training partner

that does. Community colleges, technical schools, ROP's are all potential partners that may help you gain credibility with the Host Employer.

You've Succeeded in Securing a Training Partner (What Now?):

Let's say you've gotten the green light to start a training program at a large Adult Day Health Program (ADHP) for seniors run by the County. The ADHP has a number of different departments with about two dozen hiring managers. The ADHP may have an idea which departments they want to participate in the training program or they may not. If not, you can suggest doing a presentation at an "all managers" meeting to explain the program. At the end of the presentation, you can circulate interest survey which enables the managers to voluntarily express their interest in hosting the training program. By having manager's "self-select" their participation, makes sure that the training program will be received positively and may increase the chances of participants being hired by the organization.

The Value of The Employer Having a "Low Risk" Start:

Partnering on a training program, where perhaps the participants are performing unpaid internships, creates a low-risk opportunity for the "Host Employer" to see, first-hand, the value and abilities people with ID/DD can bring to the workplace. This experience can be a powerful tool in convincing the "Host Employer" to hire.

A training program that utilizes job coaching to train participants at their internship jobs is also an opportunity for:

- The employer to have firsthand experience in working with job coaches. Job coaching is not a service most employers have been exposed to but once they have experience they usually value it highly.
- Job coaching staff to understand, in depth, the employer's operations, procedures and culture. This enables the job coaching to be efficient and effective and for the agency to make better matches (i.e. right consumer match to right job).

Building Success with Host Employer:

The Host Employer is not required to hire training program participants, but if no one is hired or hiring rarely happens, it's a problem. It means the Host Employer does not see the training program pipeline as a viable recruitment source. Its normal for hiring to be slow at first, but after several years if no hiring has taken place, you may have the wrong employer.

If on the other hand, you have people who have been hired and are successful, you have something to build upon. Its time to plan a strategy to build on that success.

First, you want the Host Employer to increase their hiring. Only one or two people hired successfully is not really enough to make it a credible program to other employers. Let's say 5 people are hired by the Host Employer, then you start to have the kind of track record that has a better chance of resonating with other employers.

Expanding Success with Other Employers (Sector Initiatives):

You want to start approaching employers in the same area and sector as the Host Employer. Once you start having successful job placements with other employers you are positioning yourself as having a "sector initiative". You start to speak in the same professional and technical language as employers in that sector. You begin to be seen by employers in that sector as an insider and not as just another job development agency.

Expanding to Other Sectors:

Once you have success a building training program in one sector, its possible to look at building programs for other sectors. All the same factors and processes apply. Its critical to look at growing occupations that have systematic duties that may be a match for people with ID/DD, and where there are employers open to the idea of training this untapped workforce.

Public Sector vs. Private Sector:

We have found that public sector employers pay close attention to diversity in their workforce. This is not always the case, but we have found largely that non-profit organizations and public sector entities, more often than private sector employers, are more willing to do the work required to make employment accessible for people with ID/DD. Many private for-profit organizations have as their number one priority making a profit for their shareholders. If employment initiatives help them to achieve a higher profit margin then great, but many times creating employment pipelines for people with barriers to employment require up front time and attention that is not appealing to for-profit organizations.

Targeting public sector or non-profit employers may seem too limiting in scope, but if you reflect on how many organizations are in this sector in your community its going to be a long list. Again there are many great examples of for-profit organizations that have very successful hiring initiatives for people with disabilities, so by no means is this strategy an absolute.

Finally, especially in the public sector salary and benefit levels for entry level positions are typically very good and lay-offs are infrequent, which is another reason to start with the sector.

