

Public/Private Partnerships

A Model for Success

Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research & Training Center
on Workplace Supports



Funded by a grant through the
National Institute on Disability and
Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR)
with the U.S. Department of Education
and the Rehabilitation Services
Administration (RSA), Washington, D.C.

Edited by:

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WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM RSA REGION IV,
EMPLOYER PARTNER TEAM

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Employment Partner Team Members

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- Bob Mullins, Florida Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Craig Respass, North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind
- Sally Siewert, Georgia State University
- Laura Spears, South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department

Business Partners

- Advance Auto Parts
- Blue Cross-Blue Shield of South Carolina
- Business Consultant
- City of Florence
- Covenergys Corporation
- CVS
- Global Products
- Home Depot
- InterContinental Hotels Groups
- Lockheed Martin
- Lowes
- MANPOWER
- Marriott International
- National Bank of Commerce
- Southtrust Bank
- SunTrust Bank
- United States Chamber of Commerce
- UNUM/Provident



Introduction

The public vocational rehabilitation program is ultimately about jobs, work, and careers for people with disabilities as a result of the services offered by vocational rehabilitation (VR). The final determination of the effectiveness of VR is whether or not its clients become employed and stay employed. In order for this to happen, of course, there needs to be ready, available and interested employers. There is no doubt that VR and employers have a lot to learn from each other in order for people with disabilities to achieve vocational goals and for employers to consider people with disabilities as the viable human resource they represent. Working together as partners will make each stronger and more effective.

Therefore, VCU-RRTC is happy to present this guide as a template for the development of mutually beneficial partnerships between public vocational rehabilitation programs and private sector employers. This publication reflects the emphasis that the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in the U.S. Department of Education is placing on the necessity for a more dynamic interchange between the leadership of state VR programs and community business leaders. It is only through such dialogue that we can ensure that the human resource demands of employers can be met by a qualified supply of job seekers represented by VR programs.

This guide is based upon the results of such a dialogue that was formalized in a Public-Private Sector Partnership Summit in Atlanta, Georgia in May, 2003. We urge all readers to pay attention to the important message present here. The employment of people with disabilities and the business bottom-line can be and should be compatible concepts. Business knows that the lifeline of its organization is good, talented, dedicated, and qualified people. The VR program has many such clients to offer. Partnerships between both groups cannot be only compatible but very powerful.

Paul Wehman, Director
VCU-RRTC on Workplace Supports





Foreword

It is no secret that the human resource needs of businesses throughout the country are undergoing continual change. The number and type of jobs that businesses need to fill undergo constant adjustment. One thing is certain - American businesses will be facing a critical shortage of workers in all industry sectors over the course of the next decade. It is the nimble company that can adjust to these circumstances and remain competitive. All types of companies will need to know where and how to find the most qualified workers to fill its human resource needs, often from resources that have not been fully exploited.

People with disabilities represent a large segment of the workforce that businesses will need to learn how to better recruit, hire, and manage. It is not simply a matter of wider diversity management, although that is an important by-product of engaging this workforce segment. There are two more important reasons for companies to go after this workforce pool. First, people with disabilities constitute a large pool from which companies can recruit, with over 43 million working age people with disabilities in this country. Second, there is help available in every state for companies to recruit from this group of job seekers through the state vocational rehabilitation agency.

Therefore, Manpower, Inc. is delighted to endorse this Private/Public Partnership Template as a vehicle for helping businesses and state vocational rehabilitation agencies to develop strong working partnerships. We hope that businesses and vocational rehabilitation offices in every region and state use this as a guide for maximizing what each has to offer the other.



Public/Private Partnership Template Summary

The issues:

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Management and Manpower, Inc. predict future workforce shortages and suggest that business should generate more effective connections to a diverse workforce.
- People with disabilities represent a significant portion of that diverse workforce.
- More direct and effective linkages between businesses and job seekers with disabilities are needed.

This guide describes actions that address these issues. The contents reflect the work of a dedicated group of rehabilitation professionals in Federal Region IV* called the Employment Partners Team. It also describes the results of a recent leadership summit organized by Virginia Commonwealth University RRTC on Workplace Supports and funded by the U.S. Department of Education RSA and NIDRR. This summit included state public vocational rehabilitation leadership and prominent private sector business leaders. A product of these two activities is a template for organizing productive partnerships between private sector business and the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) program so that employers effectively meet their human resource needs and people with disabilities get good jobs.

* Federal Region IV includes the Southeast states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee



Key Features to Developing Private/Public Partnerships

Based on what employers say they need, and based on the work of the Employment Partners Team, these ten features represent a template for VR programs, within and among states, to cultivate private business partners.

1. Form a marketing team, sanctioned by state VR leadership and advised by business partners.
2. Conduct initial and ongoing study of employer practices and the employer market.
3. Strategically plan to meet market needs and continually revise the plan based on market demands.
4. Develop customized marketing materials with targeted messages for market segments.
5. Maintain current database of employer contacts and transactions.
6. Dedicate personnel to develop and manage employer accounts.
7. Customize skill training on employer relationships for VR personnel.
8. Disseminate distinct practical guides/references for VR on employer relationships and for employers on how to use VR.
9. Make available information and resources through a dedicated website.
10. Plan for continuous dialogue and periodic forums between VR and business leaders.

For interstate development of relationships between public VR programs and companies with multi-state, regional or national operations, the key state leaders may also wish to organize a collaboration in a regional fashion. Regional efforts could be convened by entities such as the Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs, which are mandated to provide training and technical assistance to state VR program personnel and are located in each of the 10 Federal regions.

Ten Features of the Private/Public Partnership



The Ten Features

FEATURE 1: **FORM A MARKETING TEAM, SANCTIONED BY VR LEADERSHIP AND ADVISED BY BUSINESS.**

It starts at the top. The message of the effort's importance is clear when VR directors fully support, and mandate, the establishment of a designated work team that will be responsible for organizing and maintaining marketing efforts designed to reach out to employers. It is especially important to also include informed business leaders as critical members of the team. With this joint public/private involvement, the message is emphasized that business and VR are both serious in meeting each other's needs. This partnership also assures that businesses will be interested in and benefit from marketing initiatives that are undertaken as a result of the team's activities. To begin the process:

1. Determine team purpose and direction.
2. Challenge the team to not limit themselves by seeking out only those business partners who are familiar with VR.
3. Build common knowledge and language among team members through mutual education efforts.

To really sell VR services to employers, VR first has to determine what employers need. Focus on what VR can provide as solutions to companies needs.

UNUM/Provident Recruiter

4. Examine critical and typical employer needs.
5. Examine what VR can offer to meet these needs.
6. Identify current barriers to responding to these needs.
7. Set strategic action steps to strengthen VR's ability to meet employer resource needs and the employer's ability to access job seekers represented by VR.

FEATURE 2: CONDUCT INITIAL AND ON-GOING STUDY OF EMPLOYER PRACTICES AND EMPLOYER MARKET.

The human resource management practices of business and VR processes are quite different. Therefore, it requires VR to understand how employers approach human resource management. It is equally important to know what the employer market looks like, that is, what companies are hiring for which positions. This knowledge is the foundation for establishing the marketing approaches that will be developed through the succeeding steps. And since the employer market is constantly shifting along with economic circumstances and individual companies' own markets, this step requires constant re-visiting.

First, there must be employer assessments:

1. Examine individual and broad industry hiring practices: How do they recruit? Do they use staffing agencies? Do they hire full time employees, part time employees, temporary employees, etc.? What positions are typically available? What qualifications do the positions require? Who makes the hiring decisions?
2. Examine employer perceptions of people with disabilities, the accuracy of these perceptions will help determine how to frame the marketing messages and how to organize employer education and technical assistance.

A Vocational Rehabilitation representative worked directly with our store managers to find out what positions we recruit for and what new workers need to know. They then found us the right people

- CVS Pharmacy Human Resource Manager

3. Find out what experience employers have had with applicants and employees with disabilities. This will help find where positive images of job seekers with disabilities need to be cultivated and, better yet, where business supporters might be identified who can help with business-to-business marketing.

From these results the team can determine:

1. Human resource needs and requirements of different employers and of different industry segments;
2. How employer markets can be segmented for marketing focuses; and
3. Precise marketing approaches for these segments.

FEATURE 3:

STRATEGICALLY PLAN TO MEET MARKET NEEDS, AND CONTINUALLY REVISE THE PLAN TO MEET MARKET DEMANDS.

Marketing is a strategic endeavor. Framing the right message to the right audience in the most effective way requires planning. Based on information gained from the study of employer practices and employer markets, the marketing team will need to convene on a regular basis to develop its plan of action. The team may find that a facilitator trained in strategic business plan development will provide a process for collecting and organizing plans into a document that may be used as a road map for implementing partnership efforts.

Our employees need specific skills. We worked with rehabilitation to organize a training program for VR clients right in our stores.

Home Depot Executive

Look to help our bottom line. Can you focus on our sales and our expenses, will you help us increase the former and decrease the latter?"

CVS Pharmacy Human Resource Manager

Typical steps for developing a marketing plan:

1. Develop a purpose or mission for the plan.
2. Set the timeframe for accomplishing the plan, e.g., 1 year, 3 years, 5 years.
3. Determine expected outcomes, e.g., number and type of employers who will receive marketing message, who will be directly contacted, who will enter into formal partnership arrangements, etc.
4. Strategically identify goals to accomplish outcomes. It is recommended that the team establish 3-5 clear, measurable goals that can be accomplished during the timeframe.
5. Identify a strategy, tasks, lead person, and timeframe for accomplishing each goal.
6. Set key milestones that are intended to keep the team directed toward achieving the expected outcomes.

Typical steps for revising a marketing plan to stay current with the market:

1. Devote time on each team meeting agenda to review the plan.
2. Pay particular attention to progress on the plan's milestones - if milestones are consistently unmet, it is time to revise the plan.
3. Develop ways of soliciting feedback from employers who use VR, paying particular attention to how they heard of VR and what they think of the service VR has provided. This will also suggest alterations in the plan.
4. Revise tasks, timelines and milestones based on the plan review.
5. Implement activities of the revised plan.

FEATURE 4: DEVELOP CUSTOMIZED MARKETING MATERIALS AND APPROACHES WITH TARGETED MESSAGES FOR MARKET SEGMENTS.

We have many needs, not always just filling positions. Often we need assistance with job retention for workers who become disabled on the job.

*UNUM Provident
Manager*

Explain how this will benefit my business. Identify the company's needs and offer what you can do to help. This is more effective than trying to sell your program

*Lowe's Human
Resource Manager*

We often match the person to a situation, not merely to a job. If you can show me how this will benefit my company, I'll consider any candidate.

*Manpower
International
Executive*

One size does not fit all. Different industries have unique human resource needs. There are certainly common characteristics all employers seek in their employees. There are also common skills that employers in different industries will require of their respective workforces. However, there are also important distinctions in diverse industries that marketing messages must account for. Skill sets required of employees and workplace circumstances in the information technology industry will be quite distinct from those required in the health industry, for example. Therefore, the marketing messages and approaches must be tailored accordingly. Remember the marketing maxim cited in Feature 2 that emphasizes matching what you offer to the customer needs and wants.

1. Use employer advisors from specific industries to help frame marketing messages and activities.
2. Conduct focus groups with employers from particular industries to gauge reaction to marketing materials/messages/ activities.
3. Incorporate feedback from advisors and focus group participants into marketing activities.
4. Consider business-to-business marketing approaches, that is, have employers themselves talk to other employers about the value of VR services to their particular industry.
5. Look for multiple ways VR can meet company needs, not merely the referral of individual job candidates.

FEATURE 5:

MAINTAIN CURRENT DATA BASE OF EMPLOYER CONTACTS AND TRANSACTIONS.

All good marketing efforts track contact with potential and actual customers. Another marketing maxim states that if a contact is not documented, it didn't happen. Otherwise, duplicated contacts, lack of promised follow-up, and loss of valuable information might occur. Instead, well honed data management of employer contacts and customers can yield an abundance of valuable employer information that can be used for a host of purposes such as:

1. Marketing mailings;
2. Targeted invitations to forums and events;
3. Job development contacts;
4. Prevention of duplicate contacts; and
5. Expansion of partnerships with specific employers in other intra and inter state locations.

A useful database will include, at a minimum:

1. Individual company data:
 - Primary contact information
 - Industry type, i.e., finance, retail, health, information technology, manufacturing, etc.
 - Hiring practices: positions, wages, benefits, employee support, etc.
 - Experience with VR and disability employment organizations
 - Contact history
2. A protocol for its use:
 - Procedures for access: defining who can use it (e.g., designated account representatives, team members, etc.), when it can be used (e.g., after training), and how it can be used (e.g., with passwords)
 - Designated data manager who maintains the data base
 - Processes for entering new data, new contacts
 - Report generation for use by marketing team, administrators, account representatives, field staff, etc.

Communication is the key to a good partnership and a good relationship. Keep asking us what we need and we will keep telling you.

Sprint Human Resource Manager

FEATURE 6:

A single point of contact makes it so easy to develop a partnership with VR and so easy to communicate what we need. Too many people and agencies asking me for job information create confusion and misinformation.

*Lockheed Martin
Corporate Recruiter*

PERSONNEL DEDICATED TO DEVELOP AND MANAGE.

Employers consistently call for a single point of contact for hiring and supporting job seekers with disabilities in the workplace. Some state public rehabilitation agencies have responded to this need by establishing corporate account representatives who are responsible for employer development activities. These account representatives are able to filter candidate referrals to employers based on their close relationship with and knowledge of particular employers. The result is better matches between job candidates and company needs.

These professionals should be:

1. Grounded in human resource management practices;
2. Knowledgeable of workplace diversity; and
3. Skilled in addressing accommodation needs of people with disabilities.

A primary job responsibility of account representatives is analyzing employer needs and determining how services from VR can meet these needs, so that job and career opportunities are the result for job seekers with disabilities. Job duties of the account representative may include:

- Establishing and maintaining corporate accounts;
- Providing recruitment services;
- Acting as an intermediary to link individual job seekers with specific corporate accounts;
- Participating in marketing and public relations activities targeted to employers and/or industry segments; and
- Delivering training and consultation to companies on disability awareness, disability management, accommodation strategies, and using the VR system.

FEATURE 7:

CUSTOMIZED SKILL TRAINING TO VR PERSONNEL ON EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIPS.

VR field counselors typically do not have direct responsibility for what has traditionally been called "job development" or "job placement." It is a responsibility that often rests with specially designated staff, contracted vendors, and/or the job seekers themselves. However, the ultimate goal of jobs for VR clients requires that counselors have a strong background in employer relationships. This is especially necessary when there is a concerted public/private partnership initiative underway. Counselors should be aware of employer needs, put themselves in positions to interact directly with employers, and prepare their clients accordingly. There will be a distinct need, if the public/private partnership initiative is to be successful, for all VR staff to be attuned to employer needs and to reflect the quality employer customer orientation that the initiative seeks.

Training for management and counselors might include:

- What employers want from VR.
- Basic marketing concepts.
- Basics of relationship building.
- Handling employer concerns and worksite challenges.
- Making time for employers, a primary VR customer.

To support this notion further, these steps might be considered:

- Include employer relationships as part of counselor job duties.
- Establish clear protocol for relationships between counselors and account representatives (see Feature 6).
- Establish clear protocol for counselor access to and use of data base information (see Feature 5).
- Establish regular access to on-line or other training on employer relationships.

We need a point of contact for disability information. Such a person can also develop the knowledge base about disability by people in our company. Our people can then become internal champions for hiring people with disabilities.

*SunTrust Bank
Vice President*

FEATURE 8:

PRACTICAL GUIDE/ REFERENCES FOR VR AND FOR EMPLOYERS.

Information builds capacity. The more VR and employers know about each other, the more successfully they can partner. One way to put information in the hands of those who will make the partnerships work is to have brief, readily available, and easy to use references for parties to the partnership. Such references can also function as adjunctive marketing material to be placed in the hands of both new and long term partners. There are two kinds of references/guides that are useful for this purpose - one for VR personnel and one for employers.

VR personnel guide to employer relationships, which might include information on:

We need to know where to go for on-demand help when we have a question about disability or need to make some sort of reasonable accommodation.

SunTrust Bank Employee Relations Administrator

- Effective ways to represent VR to employers.
- How to find out who has hiring authority in companies.
- How to identify employers needs.
- Protocol for soliciting and interacting with company representatives.
- Resources to which employers can be referred for information: websites, publications, individual experts, etc.
- Sources for marketing materials.

Employers guide to using VR services, which might include information on:

- What is VR and how can it help employers?
- VR services available to employers.
- Where to find out information on disability issues: websites, contact persons, other sources.

FEATURE 9:

These resources are most effectively used if they are brief, concise, and easy to use. The two types of guides should contain complementary and parallel information so that the concepts and the messages are consistent with one another and there is a common language used in each. Jargon, esoteric references, and acronyms are avoided. The marketing team members and focus group participants are good barometers for testing the usefulness and organization of the information in the guides.

MAKE AVAILABLE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

It's the information age! There are few marketing initiatives and few partnership development activities that are not supported by or that do not feature a major website presence. A crisp, easy to use and professionally developed and maintained website is both a critical source of information and a marketing tool.

Websites are useful information and marketing vehicles because:

Business wants to see examples --and business to business communication on how it has worked in other companies.

Marriott International Program Administrator

- They are universal in their presence: almost every business uses the world wide web.
- They are easy to access: information is available with a few mouse clicks.
- They are amenable to continual updating: information and marketing messages must be fluid in order to stay current with market trends and new knowledge.
- They are vehicles for soliciting input and feedback from partners: surveys, email communication, and bulletin boards can be incorporated into website design
- They are great marketing adjuncts: services and resources to potential and current employer customers can be touted on the site.

A dedicated website might contain:

- Information on services, trends, issues, etc.
- Marketing information such as partner testimonials.
- Case studies of particularly effective partnerships.
- Learning resources for employers on how to use VR, information on accommodation questions, etc.
- Job postings.
- Candidate postings.
- Bulletin boards or chat rooms.
- Links to related sources of information.

Of course there has to be someone designated to be responsible to maintain, update and monitor the site. Web master(s) can be important members of, or at least regular contributors to, the marketing team and its activities.

FEATURE 10:

*I will meet with
any employers
anytime they
want to meet.*

VR Administrator

PLAN FOR CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN VR LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS LEADERS.

For VR, it's all about jobs. It is logical, not to mention critical, for VR to regularly talk to those who provide the jobs - employers. For employers it's all about finding people who can contribute to enterprises. Talking to sources of job seekers, like VR, is a critical activity for employers. Thus, sustained public/private partnerships are created when there are continuous opportunities for VR leadership and business leaders to dialogue so that they can cooperatively develop initiatives that a) support the hiring of job seekers with disabilities, b) support employers' quest to attract contributors to their workplaces, and c) build work environments that foster productivity and worker retention.

***Vocational
Rehabilitation
should go where
employers meet:
Chambers of
Commerce, local
SHRM chapter
meetings, etc.***

*SunTrust Bank
Vice President*

***I'll meet with
anyone with a
reasonable message
about how they
can help me.***

*BlueCross BlueShield
Human Resource
Manager*

Regular facilitated sessions between VR leadership and business leaders are important so that both understand:

- The value each can derive from public/private partnerships;
- How VR can make its services more appealing and convenient to employers;
- What employer human resource management needs can be met by VR, including services beyond just referral of potential job candidates;
- What incentives would attract more employers to enter into partnerships with VR; and
- What each can contribute to ongoing partnership development.

It is often useful to have a neutral third party to serve as an initiator of such dialogue. For example, the Employment Partners Team in the Southeast Region IV (see Postscript), with the assistance of the Region IV Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program, convenes regular forums at which VR leadership and business leaders meet to discuss issues of mutual concern.



Postscript I

Region IV Employment Partners Team

Latest research, development, and trends in rehabilitation, community, and business and industry have inspired the Employment Partners Team (EPT). This team represents the 12 state rehabilitation agencies in the southeast region. Its purpose is to strategically position the public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program in Region IV to be the employers' resource of choice for workforce needs. These 12 state rehabilitation agencies are represented by staff who have the ability to influence the direction of the VR agency in using its resources to meet the needs of employers. The Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs (RRCEP) at the University of Tennessee and Georgia State University are also EPT members, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration regional office.

Through informal conversations at various regional and national meetings, these professionals realized that they could benefit from learning what was going on in each of their states. These leaders asked for assistance from the RRCEP at the University of Tennessee to organize a meeting of employment representatives from each VR state agency. The VR state directors named a delegate, and the group met to share resources (brochures, videos), role and duties of employment specialists and the placement process for each state. The meeting was so successful that the group requested additional meetings to share resources, processes, ideas, and materials. Within a 12-month period, two regional meetings were held. In 1996, the group became official by establishing name, purpose, and team membership.

A number of team members were in touch with employer needs and realized that they could have a stronger impact on the region if they worked together rather than separately. The effectiveness of the EPT began increasing as they worked together on a number of projects. Establishing "Components of an Effective Employment Program" provided common knowledge for the group and a blue print for each state agency to follow. Organizing three Regional

Employment Conferences from 1997 - 2001 allowed the EPT to shape the agendas so that the region gained pertinent information about how the VR program could become the employers' resource of choice for workforce needs. To offer further support, the EPT met routinely with VR directors at regional CSAVR meetings.

The EPT gained financial support from VR directors to conduct a Regional Marketing Study of employer practices to 1) assess differences in needs, 2) determine how employer markets can be segmented, and 3) identify precise marketing approaches. Guided by the study results and recommendations, the EPT developed a Strategic Business Plan in 2000 and received a technical assistance grant from RSA to provide the resources needed to execute the plan. In keeping with their interest in staying current with employer needs, the members have revised the plan to incorporate their new thinking and direction for 2003-2005. The EPT proved to be outcome driven and a worthy investment for RSA as the team developed a regional employer database, marketing materials for targeted market segments, customized skill training for VR staff, practical guide to the employer/VR relationship, and a resource website for members.

The overarching strategic goal for the EPT is to

leverage resources and refine strategies to increase regional penetration of the employer market by collaborating throughout the region, within and across state lines.

State members network, learn from and leverage resources from one another. They share ideas on working with specific employers that may have presence in multiple states, best practices, training materials, and operational and procedural methods. Information sharing has helped to expand services and programs across the region. Presently, many of the states link with Business Leadership Networks (BLNs) because they place the employer central to their purpose. Some states have corporate account representatives that offer a single point of contact for employers. VR upper and middle management are outreaching to businesses. The EPT embraces these efforts and opportunity to discover potential company linkages within the region.

Since 2000, Corporate Forums have been held at Regional Employment Conferences that bring together VR and companies. As a result, contacts with various companies are being leveraged across states. For instance, Lowe's, Shaw Manufacturing, Suntrust Bank, Manpower, CVS, Walmart, Home Depot, and Unum Provident have had success in employing people with disabilities in one southeastern state and are interested in leveraging VR resources in other states in which they operate. The 2003 Regional Employment Conference continued this effort by providing a forum for VR directors and managers to dialogue with a host of companies with regional presence about expanding and refining partnership opportunities.

The EPT is an impetus for change in Region IV. The team's next steps in its evolution are to continue refining purpose, to assist VR executive leadership and middle management in adopting business and marketing principles, and to train and support counselors in their work with employers.



Postscript II

Public-Private Partnership Summit

Summary of Proceedings

Purpose

The purpose of this summit was to bring businesses together with the leadership of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to dialogue on how to implement and refine partnerships that meet business human resource needs and result in jobs and careers for job seekers with disabilities. The primary outcome of the Summit was the template for public/private partnerships, presented throughout this document. The proceedings of the meeting are presented below.

Background

The Summit was held in Atlanta, GA on May 29, 2003 and included representatives from twenty-one (21) companies and VR leadership from eight (8) Southeastern states (FL, GA, AL, MS, TN, KY, NC, & SC). Business participants recruited for participation were known to have experience partnering with VR and disability employment agencies. VR leadership included state directors and upper level management personnel.

The Summit was sponsored by Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports Business Roundtable and was held in conjunction with the biannual Region IV Employment Partners Training Conference.

Agenda and Purpose

The core of the process was workgroup discussions during which the business participants were guided by facilitators to respond to and discuss the following set of questions. Responses by business participants that were common to each of the discussion groups are also summarized.

Why do you value public-private partnerships?

- There are mutual benefits derived from them.
- They create an opportunity to hire talent.
- They allow more choices in hiring.
- Knowledge and leveraging additional resources.

How can VR management make its services more appealing/convenient to employers?

- Organize a single point of contact, a one person mechanism through which to establish relationship.
- Attend and participate in employer organizations.
- Take time to understand business needs, this should be the basis of a relationship, not charity.
- Educate business on accommodation and disability issues.
- Advertise success stories and show good examples of how they work.
- Provide careful pre-screening to match candidates to business needs.

What are human resource needs beyond referral of individual job candidates that could be provided by VR.?

- Service after the sale by providing job retention services.
- Joint training ventures to upgrade the candidates' skills.
- On demand training and consultation on disability and accommodation issues.

What incentives would attract more employers to enter into partnerships with VR?

- A single point of contact.
- Marketing that links partnerships to bottom line and diversity issues.
- Positive public exposure for the company who hires people with disabilities.
- Simplified contact processes.
- Tax credits and incentives that are simple and easy to access.
- Any activity that shows concern for bottom line.

What would you be willing to contribute to the partnership?

- Time to meet with VR representatives.
- Share experiences with other businesses.
- Co-host trainings.
- Invite and welcome VR to meetings of business organizations.

The dialogue from VR leadership in relation to these employer responses indicated a strong desire to collaborate in addressing employer responses. Several of the state VR directors made explicit commitments to continue similar dialogue with businesses in their respective states and to work with them to improve partnerships and responsiveness to business circumstances.

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