

Technical Report on the Business Partnership Summit

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**COUNCIL OF STATE ADMINISTRATORS OF
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**



**VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY,
REHABILITATION RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER
ON WORKPLACE SUPPORTS & JOB RETENTION**

**Labor shortage of
an estimated 10
million
employees in
2010.**

Herman & Groin, 2000



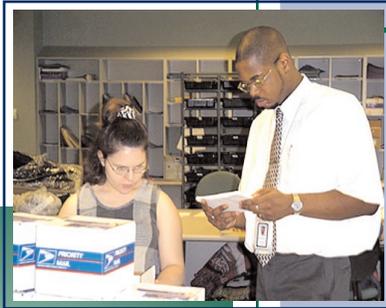
Partnership is a word that conjures up warm feelings of togetherness and collaboration. Yet, we know that forging a cooperative venture or partnership between two entities can be complex and difficult. Limited information exists on public-private sector partnerships and their long-term impact on the job tenure and employment outcomes of people with disabilities, despite the fact there have been episodic efforts over the years to examine collaborations between business and rehabilitation service providers (Buys & Rennie, 2001; Egan, 2001). Effective public-private partnerships are often born out of necessity. For example, the private sector will face a labor shortage of an estimated 10 million employees in 2010 and will need to actively recruit a workforce from a variety of untapped pools of talent (Herman & Gioia, 2000). Currently, individuals with disabilities represent one of the largest pools of untapped talent ready to enter the workforce. Private sector business community members report that while hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense, they often do not know how to tap into this labor force (Barrons, March 17, 2003). At the same time the public sector rehabilitation providers are working to get their message out that they are ready, willing and able to support employers with opportunities that will save them time and money in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of valuable workers with disabilities (Anderson, 2001).

Clearly there are a number of public-private partnerships, functioning in a variety of forms, which are ultimately proving to be beneficial to all parties involved. Many rehabilitation professionals are actively working every day to strengthen their relationships with businesses to ultimately increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Similarly, companies are realizing that rehabilitation is an extremely valuable resource and employing individuals with disabilities has positive effects on their bottom line.

Recognizing these factors, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention (VCU-RRTC) joined forces with Bank of America Card Services, formerly MBNA, to host a regional Business Summit. The goal of the Summit was to model a thriving partnership while engaging the business and the rehabilitation community in a candid discussion about public-private partnerships. Further, it was the purpose of this Business Partnership Summit to provide information on how rehabilitation adds value to business while sharing best practices that can be disseminated to other businesses, state vocational rehabilitation programs, and community rehabilitation programs across the country while also examining strategies that eliminate existing and potential barriers. To ensure a balanced and focused discussion, participation was limited to approximately 60 invitees with an equal number of private sector business representatives and a equal number of public sector vocational rehabilitation representatives.

The Summit was a single day event hosted by the Bank of America in Newark, Delaware who has a long standing relationship with Delaware VR and several community rehabilitation programs. CSAVR shared information on their National Business Network; the Vice President from WaWa provided a vision of an effective partnership leading to employment of youth with disabilities within their company; and Bank of American Card Services provided a tour of their facility where many employees with disabilities met with participants to discuss their careers. The bulk of the day was spent engaged in group discussions sharing personal experiences of issues, concerns, barriers and stories of true success.

BANK OF AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY



Commitment to diversity and inclusion is one of the core values on which our company is built.

Ken Lewis, Chair & CEO
Bank of America



The Bank of America relationship with VR and its community service agencies works because it provides all of the supports necessary to create a successfully career outcomes for people with significant disabilities.

Andrea Guest, Director
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Department of Labor

"Diversity at Bank of America is good for business, good for relationships, and simply put, the right thing to do. Because our commitment to diversity and inclusion is one of the core values on which our company is built, we go out of our way to ensure that associates, customers or anyone else who touches our company is free to pursue their dreams without regard to the challenges they may face because of a disability. Our view is that people with disabilities are an important part of our shared present and future. The ideas and behaviors that reinforce this view — such as respect, fairness and inclusion -- bring us together and make us a great company."

— Ken Lewis, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Bank of America

Serving customers with disabilities...

- Developed Bank of America Accessible Banking™, a comprehensive approach to offering accounts and services that increase access for customers.
- Conducted the first comprehensive survey of consumers who are blind, deaf or have a mobility impairment in the financial services industry.
- Formed an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Accessibility Business Unit Advisory Team in 2003 to maximize access and simplify banking for everyone including individuals with disabilities by establishing guidelines that will ensure products, services and the banking environment are usable by as many people as possible.
- Provides alternative consumer checking and savings statement formats such as Braille, large-print, automated, online and reader services, and consumer credit card statements in Braille and large print.
- Integrated font-size standards for consumer brochures and communication pieces to increase readability for people with vision impairments.
- Committed more than \$1 billion to businesses that are owned by multicultural individuals, females or people with disabilities as part of its Supplier Diversity and Development Initiative.
- Was recognized with a Profile of Excellence Award from the Solutions Marketing Group, a disability-related marketing firm, that honors companies working to make their products and services available to all customers.
- Embraces the principles of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) by providing equal access to its banking centers for all customers and associates.
- Was honored by the American Association of People with Disabilities with its "Justice for All" award for the work of Bank of America's associate, Annette Kellermann, the only such corporate recognition in 2004.

CSAVR's COMMITMENT TO DISABILITY



CSAVR is actively working with business consumers, and VR State agencies to develop a National Business Network.

Kathy West-Evans
Director of Business Relations

The national network of public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs recognizes the importance of business as a customer. The VR system receives public funding to serve people with disabilities as the primary customer. However, the individual's vocational planning, training, employment preparation and career development opportunities depend upon the counselor's and the consumer's understanding of the employment needs and expectations of business. The bottom line is that active business involvement enhances the careers, employment outcomes and independence of people with disabilities served by the public VR program, while also meeting the employment needs of business. For their part, CSAVR is actively working with business, consumers, and VR State agencies to develop a national business network called The NET. NET is the acronym for the National Employment Team a brand established in coordination with the network's business customers. The vision is to create a coordinated approach to serving business customers through a national VR team that specializes in employer development, business consulting and corporate relations. The dual customer approach provides many benefits to include:

1. Business has direct access to qualified applicants and the support services provided by the public VR system;
2. VR consumers have access to national employment opportunities and career development resources; and
3. VR agencies have a national system for sharing employment resources, best practices and business connections.

— Kathy West-Evans, Director of Business Relations, CSAVR

FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE

A focus group strategy was selected for this project because it was the intent of the CSAVR and VCU-RRTC to address the current gap between private sector and public sector rehabilitation. The private sector has needs for recruiting and retaining a competent workforce, and the public sector rehabilitation has a ready supply of labor and tools to support employee job retention. Discussion questions were designed to bring out insights and understandings in a straightforward and structured manner that would effectively accomplish the goal of the project. A highly interactive setting was created across the four focus groups with participants encouraged to express their opinions, react to other group members who spark ideas, and fill-in important gaps left by others.

Each group was led by a moderator with experience in group facilitation. The moderator's job was to encourage participation from all group members and to structure the process ensuring that no one person was able to limit or dominate group discussion. Further, it was the responsibility of the moderator to provide prompting questions to expand discussions or elicit expansion on interesting sub-topics, as well as to return conversation to the structures topic schedule. Finally, each group had an assigned recorder. This individual created a visual memory of the group discussion and had authority to stop discussion to obtain regular feed back from participants to ensure that the meeting notes, records of group conversations, choice of words, and non-verbal or subtle communications were all accurately captured. What follows are themes that emerged from these focus group discussions.

PUBLIC & COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS PARTICIPATING

- Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Delaware Division of Visually Impaired
- Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services
- Maryland Office of Blindness & Vision Services
- Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Massachusetts Commission for the Blind
- State of Delaware Executive Department Office of Management & Budget
- Chimes - Delaware
- Elwyn - Delaware
- Home for Life Foundation
- ARC of Delaware Board
- Goodwill Industries Keystone Area
- AHEDD - Pennsylvania
- Janet Fiore - The Sierra Group, Pennsylvania
- SBDC Network-- Maryland
- Humanim
- Alliance Inc.
- Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Goodwill Industries of Kyowva Area, Inc.
- U.S. Department of Education - Rehabilitation Services Administration

Identification of Strategies and Barriers - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and community rehabilitation programs (CRP) are interested in assisting businesses meet their labor needs. What is working in your community that leads to strong partnerships and what are some barriers.

Themes generated by discussion on what leads to strong partnerships.

- Executive leadership has crafted external and internal written communications expressing support of partnerships leading to improved employment of people with disabilities.
- Open communication and shared educational programs, resources and talent exist between the State VR agency, local CRPs and business people and organizations.
- Partners (rehabilitation-business) act as intermediary to tackle unique or difficult situations.
- There exists a brand recognition of successful models, and a clear understanding of purpose and expectations.
- An "applicant friendly" process is put in place that assesses capabilities outside of the traditional selection tools.
- A well documented avenue/process is put in place to educate staffing companies/head hunters in recognizing the search for new workforce candidates can include individuals with disabilities.
- A recognized body of champions within the business community is identified who have linked with VR and its national network to open doors with other businesses.

Themes generated from discussion on barriers getting in the way of successful partnerships:

- Misunderstanding of ADA regarding compliance issues, personnel policies, and performance measures.
- Limited opportunities for industrial job shadowing and business mentors.
- Inadequate understanding of workplace supports and how they can be used to achieve career success.
- Fragmented information sources for successful business models.
- Over promising and lack of follow up from community rehabilitation program for the new employee with a disability.
- Language and jargon used by public sector does not reflect what businesses need in their assessment of skill sets.
- A disconnect between a first line manager and Human Resources regarding the commitment and resources to hire and maintain workers with disabilities.

#2

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION #2

Workplace Supports - Brainstorm some of the workplace supports utilized by rehabilitation and business that are having a positive outcome on the employment of people with disabilities.

Themes generated from discussion on identifying workplace supports that have a positive impact on employment of people with disabilities.

- Internal support networks - Affinity Groups.
- Leveraging of Internship Programs.
- Internal and external communications that create motivation and inspiration around achieving success.
- Worksite accommodations available and accessible including job coaches and co-workers.
- Personnel training programs that dispel myths and stereotypes of people with disabilities and MBA programs that include disability studies.
- Business case studies to share with other companies regarding success.

#3

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION #3

Communication - We are interested in expanding public-private partnerships to include more employers. What has been your experience in accessing needed supports from VR and other community rehabilitation service providers? How easy was it to access support services from state to state? What worked? Where could we make improvements?

Themes generated from discussion on business experience accessing needed supports from rehabilitation community (VR and CRPs).

- Community disconnects exist between business and the rehabilitation community.
- There is no collective voice representing public rehabilitation programs supporting people with disabilities in employment.
- Business is not seen as a customer by the public rehabilitation community, therefore resources are not allocated to Business Development.
- Rehabilitation community providers do not perceive themselves as a business and do not interact with business professionally.

Themes generated from discussion on needed improvements and recommendations.

- Constructive communication across supportive businesses to network solutions (i.e., Business Leadership Network & VR National Business Network).
- Simplify service delivery system promoting a quicker, more immediate process.

BUSINESSES PARTICIPATING

- AstraZeneca
- Avenue Medical
- Baltimore Chamber of Commerce
- Bank Of America
- Christiana Care Health Services
- Compass Group
- Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
- Delaware State Personnel Office
- DuPont
- Embassy Suites
- Goodyear Tire & Rubber
- Elliott-Vandriver Hibbs & Associates
- ING DIRECT
- JP Morgan Chase
- MANPOWER
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- Son's Quality Food
- SunTrust Bank, Inc.
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- University of Delaware
- W.L. Gore & Associates
- WaWa

#4

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION #4

- Establishment of a business network (i.e., CSAVR).
- Training programs reflect changing labor market needs.
- Development of better press and marketing efforts for telling rehabilitation stories.
- Establish a common message to businesses.

Future - Dream with us, how do you envision these partnerships looking ten years down the road?

Dreams that emerged when participants were asked to share their vision for a public-private partnership in 10 years.

- Better integration of services and supports with a bottom-line mentality providing resources to business.
- Pockets of excellence in hiring and advancing people with disabilities in employment is expanded to all businesses and career tracks.
- Strength of VR services as an enabler is sought after vs. being viewed as a barrier.
- No need for VR or community providers because employers "want" to hire people with disabilities and work supports are embedded in culture of business
- School system as a community partner - producing job-ready candidates of young people who are graduating from secondary and post-secondary schools with jobs.
- Businesses see hiring people with disabilities as a business issue, not a community relations opportunity to give back to the community.
- A national think tank of high level executives with disabilities exists sharing and being national role models for other businesses leaders as well as job applicants with disabilities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM THE 2006 BUSINESS SUMMIT

Getting a good return on an investment is important everyone. Participants from the Business Summit were looking for a good return on their investment of time and resources when they agreed to attend this event. CSAVR and VCU-RRTC assured the group that they would not only facilitate a highly focused and interactive day but the findings from the Summit would be widely disseminated to produce the desired outcomes expressed by group members. The following are some highlights of short term outcomes that have been achieved to date which can be directly attributed to the Business Summit.

(continued)

Bank of America's workplace policies and culture has resulted in the employment of many individuals with disabilities across the entire company. In the Wilmington, Delaware's Bank Card Center they have embraced a unique supported employment model which has grown from a small pilot program consisting of four individuals. Today there are 300 employees with cognitive and other developmental disabilities working at the Bank and Delaware VR has been a major supporter of these efforts. Many Summit group members toured Bank of America's Division of Support Services and had an opportunity to observe and speak directly with numerous long-term employees. This experience caused several participating businesses to explore the possibility of using supported employment in their own company.

- AstraZeneca has received technical assistance from Bank of America and will start hiring candidates with developmental disabilities in early 2007.
- W.L. Gore and DuPont located in the Wilmington, Delaware are engaged in discussions on how to best implement supported employment.

AstraZeneca - Delaware VR has had a working relationship with the company. The VR connections were expanded to fit the AstraZeneca's business footprint, including VR connections in California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Texas. Based on feedback from the company and the VR point of contact in Delaware, a business profile was developed to introduce the VR team to the employment needs of the company. The NET VR team assisted with recruiting to fill AstraZeneca positions in Massachusetts.

Other businesses interested in hiring people with disabilities were sparked by an article in The New Journal, written by a Summit participant. [1]. Subsequent to the Summit an in-depth news article regarding the hiring and retaining workers with disabilities was featured on the front page. VCU-RRTC has responded to 19 requests for information from these readers interested hiring people with disabilities.

The Delaware State Chamber of Commerce, also represented at the Summit, provided significant insights into the needs of small businesses and expressed an interest in educating its membership regarding the employment of people with disabilities. Delaware Business, a magazine published by the Chamber of Commerce, featured an article sharing a business strategy for hiring people with disabilities to address the employment challenge of the 21st century. Lisa Chase (2006) shared tax credit information and ideas for forming partnerships with the state and local vocational rehabilitation programs to support the hiring, advancement, and retention of employees with disabilities [2].

David Yeager, Vice President of WaWa, reports that he has received many phone calls from Summit participants to discuss their youth with disability training and employment program. Two significant outcomes can be directly attributed as outcomes from the Business Summit.

- Shared the WaWa youth employment model to the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) national employment conference reaching over 500 individuals.
- Providing in-depth partnership development and technical assistance with New Jersey Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to improve the employment of youth with disabilities.

SUMMARY

There are many excellent examples of effective public-private partnerships that are supporting the employment and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Studying the themes generated from this one day event and documented in this booklet can be extremely helpful in avoiding pitfalls and creating a blueprint for building successful partnerships designed to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

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[1] Craig, Robert (2006, September 24). Turning small possibilities into big realities. Sunday News Journal, p.A1.
[2] Chase, L. (2006) Meeting the 21st century employment challenge. Delaware Business, 12 (6), 21-23.