Establishing and Maintaining Employer Partnerships

August 15, 2025

Yana Mann (YM): Welcome. Greetings, everyone. My name is Yana, and I am a program officer for the International Rescue Committee Technical Unit, where I typically support economic empowerment programs across the IRC network. I have spent about seven years advancing workforce development efforts in [the] Sacramento office, helping refugees and immigrants access both career pathways and achieve economic stability.

Now, in my current role, I support national economic empowerment projects through Switchboard, providing technical assistance to strengthen service delivery for refugee-serving organizations. I continue to be deeply committed to supporting refugee communities and believe in creating opportunities that truly allow individuals to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose. Now, again, welcome to today's webinar.

YM: All right. This webinar today is something that we in Switchboard call our “Throwback Thursday.” This series of webinars bring[s] back our most requested webinars, giving you a second chance to catch the insights that you need. Now, while recordings are always available, joining live just offers a unique engagement. As with all of our sessions, this webinar is open to all refugee service providers across state agencies, resettlement organization, and our partner groups.

I would love to do a brief overview of learning objectives for today. Number one, you will be able to describe the importance of employer partnerships in context of job placement for ORR-eligible populations. Next, we will go through identifying some key considerations and benefits for employers and newcomer employees when establishing and maintaining partnerships.

Next, we will also dive into implementing best-practice job development approaches to effectively support newcomer clients in securing those high-quality job placement[s]. Last but not least, we'll go over how to recognize those common challenges in maintaining employer relationships and name some strategies for overcoming them.

YM: All right. I would love to start our conversation talking about the role of employer partnerships in placing newcomers in high-quality jobs. Now, we know that there is no high-quality jobs without high-quality employer partnerships, but we also know that each of you are in very different places with your partnership network. Some of you might have a lot of partners that are established and you've been working with for years, and some of you are very new and just starting to work on this. I would love to invite you to an activity so we can get a feel of where we are in terms of your employer partnerships.

1. The Role of Employer Partnerships: Placing Newcomers in High-Quality Jobs

YM: On your screen, you see a brief Slido quiz. On your computer, on your phone, if you could go to www.slido.com and enter the code that you see on the screen, or you can simply scan the QR code that you see and start the quiz. Wonderful. I see some answers coming in already. Wonderful. All right. The first one, “We rely on one or two partnerships for most placement, and these employers do not really meet our needs.”

We have another option that “We rely on one or two employer partners, and they do meet all or most of our clients' needs.” Then we also have “We rely on a diverse set of employer partners.” Beautiful. They do meet our needs. It looks like we have a real mix of answers here. I thank you for participating. This will tie into what I will be covering in the next section. Thank you so much, folks. Wonderful.

YM: Let's just dive right in and talk about the importance of securing a quality job. I know most of you work in economic empowerment, and often, as employment specialists or job developers, you already understand how critical employment is for the family's stability. Some other participants on this call may be newer to this work and come from roles that are adjacent to job development, where employer engagement is just a part of your responsibilities. Regardless of your roles, we truly share a common goal, which is helping newcomers secure those high-quality jobs that offer stability, opportunity, and dignity.

Today, we'll take a look at why these jobs truly matter and how they impact every area of clients' lives. We're just going to go ahead and start with food and housing security. Quality job ensures steady income to meet basic survival needs. We are just simply talking about keeping a roof overhead and food on the table, those basic needs. For many newcomers, it really is the first and most urgent priority after resettlement.

Next, household essentials. Beyond rent and groceries, steady employment truly enables our clients to afford essentials like clothing, transportation, utilities, technology—really items that support daily functioning and integration into their new community. Next, we move into health insurance. Now, in the U.S., most people access their health coverage through their employer. A quality job often means affordable healthcare for the individual and their family, which is crucial for both preventative care treatment and, of course, chronic conditions.

YM: Now, moving into social connections. We all know that employment fosters social capital—connections with your coworkers, supervisors, and network that can lead to better physical, mental, and economic outcomes. For newcomers, workplace relationships can also accelerate their cultural adaptation. Moving into language, English practice. Workforce place, of course, can be one of the most effective environments for English language learning. Daily interactions, instructions, and social exchanges all contribute to real-world language acquisition.

Moving into dignity and purpose. For many clients, especially those who have experienced trauma or displacement, employment provides a lot more than income. It offers structure, self-worth, and sense of purpose. There's a lot of research that shows that stable employment can serve as protective factor for mental health as well. Last but not least, compliance with ORR funding requirements. Most of us on this call are funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which requires us to help clients achieve that self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

YM: Having those strong employer partnership in place directly supports this mandate and enables us to meet funding expectations while delivering on our mission at the same time. Basically, securing a quality job is not just about the paycheck. It really is a foundation for long-term stability, health, and integration into the community. For our clients, it truly is a bridge between arrival and then thriving in their new community. As we move through today's session, we'll explore some practical strategies for building the employer partnership that make these outcomes truly possible.

The question is, why do we really rely on employer partnerships? The answer is really simple. They are the ones that have the most powerful tools to help newcomers overcome employment barriers and secure quality jobs. Now, those partnerships truly open doors, create opportunities, and allow us to address challenges in the way we simply couldn't without employer buy-in.

Many of our clients we know experience language barriers. Mobility changes is very true for so many of them. Of course, limited U.S. work experience. On top of that, they have left behind very strong professional and personal networks, most likely in their home countries, networks that once placed a critical role in securing the job. Without those networks here, finding a job becomes significantly harder.

YM: Let's talk a little bit about partnerships. When we have trusted partner relationships with employers, we can also negotiate for many things for our clients, such as, potentially, language support on the job, flexible schedules, and some other accommodations that might help lower barriers to placement. This relationship also makes it possible to influence job quality and [ensures] that positions are truly fair, safe, and conducive to long-term retention with employers.

When it comes to the fact that job placements are faster and easier to secure—according to LinkedIn, roughly about 80% of jobs are obtained through personal and professional networks. Very often, it is who you know. By connecting our clients to employer partners, we help them expand their networks and create a direct pipeline into hiring opportunities. This really speeds up the placement, reduces the time clients are unemployed, and help them integrate more quickly.

Employer partnerships are not just about filling those job openings. They are really about creating pathways to opportunity. They help bridge the gap between the skills and potential of our clients and the opportunities that are available in the labor market. With these relationships in place, we can help clients overcome barriers, access high-quality jobs faster, and build the network that leads to long-term success.

YM: Next, let's dive into phases of employer partnership development. Building strong, lasting relationship with employers doesn't really happen overnight. It is a process. It begins with understanding some of your local market, moves into making a strong strength-based pitch, and then culminates in negotiating terms that truly benefit your client. Each phase builds on the one before it. I would love to dive into them one by one.

YM: Research and targeted outreach— [a] topic that [is] most likely very familiar to all of you. Before making the contact, we always recommend investing the time in understanding your labor market and identifying industries with hiring potential in your particular state, in your particular county, et cetera. This typically includes analyzing labor market indicators to see where the demand actually is.

Next, spending time on job boards to track openings and trends. Talking directly to industry representatives to get insider perspective is also really important. Reading job descriptions, spending time with your clients to actually learn their skills, their goals, and the types of jobs that they would be a really good match for. This groundwork ensures your outreach is strategic and that your organization is approaching the right employers with the right opportunities for your clients.

Moving into building on that…comes [the] strength-based pitch. Once you've identified potential partners, we advise to present both your clients and your organization's services in a positive, solution-focused way. That often means highlighting clients' strengths, skills, and readiness, showcasing your organization's services. What is it exactly that you offer and can support? Is it transportation support? Do you do interview preparation? Do you have assistance with applications that your job developers and employment specialists can offer?

YM: Are there any wraparound supportive services that your organization offers that can make the process smoother? Also, positioning your organization as a professional, reliable, and personable partner, one that they can trust and truly enjoy working with. It's really good to remember that you are pitching your clients, your organization's services, and the value of the lasting partnership.

Then moving to one of the last components, actual negotiation. With a strong relationship foundation, you can move into negotiation from a position of strength. For example, you would want to reinforce the value your organization and your clients bring to employer. A good example would be something like "Our clients bring strong retention rates, which reduces your recruitment and training cost"—being very upfront with an employer.

Another example could be "Our organization can help streamline onboarding by providing cultural orientation and language support before day one." That is something that a lot of organizations on this call are offering and capable of doing. We also recommend discussing how hiring your clients would benefit their business. Saying something along the lines of "Our clients have specialized skills in high-demand area, allowing you to fill hard-to-stay roles pretty quickly."

YM: Negotiate for what your clients need to succeed: high-quality jobs, living wages, flexible scheduling, or workplace accommodations. Negotiation is really not about asking for favors. It really is about creating this win-win agreement that supports both the employer goals and the client's success. Therefore, employer partnerships are built through intentional steps. Again, research, strong pitching, and thoughtful negotiation. When each phase is done well, you create relationship that leads to high-quality opportunities for the clients that you are serving.

2. Key Considerations in Establishing Employer Partnerships

YM: Wonderful. I would love to move to our learning objective number two and take a deep dive into key considerations in establishing employer partners. All right. I have another interactive activity for you folks. Your Slido might still be open. The next questions that I would love for you to think about "What are some difficulties employer partners might face when hiring and onboarding newcomers?" Please feel free to scan the QR code if you haven't yet. All right. We are seeing a lot of responses specifically for language, language barriers, language barrier.

Cultural differences. Very accurate. Absolutely. Transportation. That is a concern for so many of our employers. Concept of time, not understanding. Documentation. Lack of experience, lack of work experience. More and more language-related topics coming up. Cultural differences. Jargon. Fear of uncertainty with immigration issues. Employment authorization. Child care. Very valid.

Absolutely. Let's keep them coming for a few more moments. Miscommunication. Language barrier. Absolutely. Development certification, yes. Mix of language barriers. Again, child care. Thank you so much. Thank you very much for your active participation. Again, cultural differences. Absolutely. Absolutely. It looks like we are seeing all of these aspects across the board with a lot of employers. Thank you so much again.

YM: Next, I would love for you to keep Slido open. Now, I want you to think through the opposite. Now, we just explored the challenges or worries the employer might have. Now, I would like for you to think through how can employers benefit from working with our clients, from working with your organization. Immediate hires. Beautiful. Hardworking. Talent. They are motivated. Hardworking. Dedication. Absolutely. Culture. Language abilities.

Retention. I love that a lot of folks are putting higher retention. There's a lot of research that backs up higher retention rates with refugee and immigrant population. Again, immediate hires. Staff support. Ready to work. Talent availability. Diversified ideas. Diversity. Retention. Many of you are mentioning this. Resilience. New, brilliant ideas. Willing to do anything. Go extra mile, extra step. Responsibility. Motivation.

I so appreciate you folks' participation. There's definitely benefits of hiring the clients, working with us, working with our clients. It really is our job to become well-versed in talking about the skills and talents that our clients bring to potential employer partners and the benefits that our organization brings, so we can represent and advocate for our clients more and more. I love all of those answers.

YM: [The] practice of focusing on what we are doing well over focusing on perceived weakness is actually something that is called strength-based perspective. This is something that I would love to spend some time diving into today. I want to ground our conversation in the actual philosophy that shapes how we, in humanitarian sector, approach this work, the strength perspective. This perspective really reminds us to focus not on the deficits or barriers that our clients might have, but instead on the resilience, talents, and aspirations our clients bring with them.

It truly is the mindset that centers on the capacity of our clients to succeed and the opportunities for employers to benefit from their skills, creativity, and determination, as a lot of you mentioned in the Slido activity. I love this quote from Kansas University School of Social Welfare that says, “This strength perspective emphasizes the human capacity for resilience, resistance, courage, thriving, and ingenuity.” It sounds like this is very accurate, and it speaks to your experience with working with employers in our population.

YM: Next, I would love to dive a little bit deeper into strength-based approach. In our work, we quite often enter conversations with employers from a place of compassion. We wouldn't be in this field if we didn't have compassion. We know that our clients have endured challenges, and they've demonstrated remarkable resilience. Now, while this empathy that we have is incredibly important, we also need to remember that most employers are ultimately just looking for high-quality and reliable employees.

Our role as refugee serving organization is to connect those priorities by advocating from strength-based perspective. How do we do this effectively? The job developer or employment specialist should advocate for the job seeker. Now, the strength-based approach means leading with what candidate can contribute, not with the challenge that they face. Instead of focusing on the barriers, we frame the conversation around their abilities, motivation, and potential.

What's not to say? I'm going to give a quick example. "I'm wondering if you might be willing to hire Maria. She has had such a hard life, and she survived a terrible war. She has many kiddos that she's the main provider for. Her English isn't very good. I'm really concerned for her. Would you please help us place her?" That would be one way to describe Maria's situation. That is typically not recommended because that approach intentionally lists barriers that most likely will discourage the employer from hiring.

YM: What we recommend to say instead would be, "Maria would be an incredible addition to your workforce. She is a quick learner and eager to learn. She has an exceptional work ethic and speaks three languages, which could be a huge asset for your staff and customers." This approach completely reframes the conversation and focuses on Maria's skills, drive, and potential value that she would add to this employer.

Talking about [how the] employer benefits from the talent, skills, language, capacity, and global perspective of a job seeker, we really want to highlight the strength and address employers' needs. What do employers typically need? Multicultural communication skills, most likely, adaptability, cross-cultural understanding, strong work ethics. Show how these qualities improve customer relations, strengthen teams, and reduce turnover, and introduce your clients.

Next, we'll dive a little bit more into the job developer or employment specialist being confident in the financial benefit of no-cost recruiting. This is something that also should be on your radar. Please do emphasize that your organization provides no-cost, full-service recruiting services that traditionally staff and agencies charge significant fee for. Position this as both a cost-saving and time-saving advantage for your employer. By approaching employers with confidence and focusing on the strength our clients bring, we really shift the narrative from doing a favor to really making a smart hire. This sets the stage for sustainable partnerships and truly ensures that our clients enter workforce with dignity, value, and potential growth.

YM: Moving into the actual preparation phase of strength-based pitch. When it comes the time to have this conversation and prepare for strength-based pitch, it helps to have clear framework in mind. A strong pitch is really not improvised. It is very intentional. It is informed, and it is tailored to both the candidate and the employer needs. One way to ensure that we are fully prepared is to consider these four dimensions that you are seeing on your screen right now.

We'll talk through all of them a little bit more in depth, but here they are at the glance. Candidate skill set—understanding the candidate's abilities, strengths, and transferable skills. Candidate presentation—basically talking [about] how the candidate is presented to the employer, including professionalism, confidence, et cetera. Moving into job description—basically matching the candidate's skill set and experience to a specific requirement of the role. Last but not least, labor market research—knowing that current hiring trends, demands in the industry, and of course, competitive pay rates are really important.

I would love to dive into each of them in more detail. Beautiful. The first dimension that I would like to review would be candidate skill set. Truly knowing your client—and throughout this presentation today, I will continue to go back to this point. We want to really know and understand our clients, so that fact allows us to match them with the right opportunity and confidently present them to employers. This goes really way beyond just the resume. It is about understanding their full range of abilities, experiences, and their unique talents. When you take time to learn about your client's skills and background, you're better equipped to highlight what they bring to the table to your employer.

YM: Let's dive a little bit more into the factors that would make the job ideal for this candidate. It could be location, title, pay, benefits, of course, upward mobility, et cetera. Next, employment history. We want to know previous roles of our clients. We want to know which industries they worked at, what responsibilities they had. Next, moving into another important component, education history. We are talking about degrees. We are talking about certification and any relevant training that your clients obtained overseas.

Next, moving into special skills. It could be a huge array of different skills. Could be technical skills, could be trade experience, could be computer literacy, variety of different abilities, but basically your candidate's story of perseverance and resilience, all of the skills that got them where they are. Last but not least, we are talking about elements of clients' cross-cultural experience. We are referring to their knowledge, their perspectives, of course, their language skills that could potentially benefit your employer.

For instance, imagine a client who worked extensively with diesel fuel systems in another country. For example, a local bus company could benefit greatly from that specific technical expertise paired with clients' bilingual abilities to support diverse team communication. By fully understanding the candidate's skill set, you can truly present them to employers in a way that is both compelling and also directly relevant to the job's needs.

YM: Next, we'll move into candidate presentation. Now that you have clear understanding of your client's skills, backgrounds, and needs, the next step is to package that information in a way that makes a strong and appealing impression on your potential employer partner. This is your candidate's presentation. First impressions really, really matter, especially when you're building new partnership.

Let's talk a little bit more about components. We'll start with professional resume. Now, of course, for new employer relationship, we want to ensure that clients have a polished, professional resume that truly helps establish credibility and create strong first impression. Moving into LinkedIn profile, for mid-to-late career opportunities, we absolutely want to support clients in creating and updating a LinkedIn profile with very clear professional presentation of their skills and experience.

Next, we'll move into professional summary. We always recommend developing a short, compelling professional summary to use in emails when you're introducing your candidate. It could be something like, "Here is a brief profile of one of my candidates. Would you like me to send over their resume?" This approach can save time if an employer isn't really ready for resume review just yet.

YM: Moving into professional email address. We all know that so many of our clients that are coming from overseas do not have a professional email. We do encourage clients to use a professional, easy-to-read email address that reflects very positively during the hiring process. Last but not least, professional headshot. Link the headshot to the LinkedIn profile. We always recommend doing so. Take a professional photo, update this. This is a small step, but it can make a huge difference in how employers perceive and take their candidacy seriously.

I do want to say that not every candidate will need all of these elements. When building new employer partnership, it pays to put your really best foot forward. Just a brief example, if you are working with Amazon Warehouse to hire your candidate, resume and application would probably be sufficient for this particular employer. If you are working with highly educated civil engineers from Afghanistan that have master's degrees and 10 to 15 years of work experience, they will absolutely benefit from all of these elements.

YM: All right. Then I would love to next move into job description research. To effectively match our clients with opportunities, we need to develop a strong understanding of what makes someone a good candidate for a specific role. This usually begins with learning about the jobs themselves. Now, the more you know about the position available with your employer partners, the better equipped you are to present candidates to meet their needs.

All right. How do we exactly educate ourself? Beautiful. A solid knowledge about the jobs at hand helps you speak the employer language and really build trust. We also want to avoid being overwhelmed. While it can feel daunting, sometimes it feels like you need to learn every detail about every job. It is not really about mastering every specialty. For example, you know that in your community, there's an employer that is hiring welders. It doesn't mean that you need to know every single thing and every specialty of welding. Instead, we suggest for you to focus on the skills and qualifications and the requirements of the job, of the roles your clients will be working in.

YM: Next, moving into practical steps that you can see on your screen, just some recommendations for you folks. Read job descriptions. Review posting for similar roles to see what skills, certification, and experience employers value in your area. Research online. Use very familiar engines. Please utilize job boards like Indeed and Glassdoor to explore industry expectations and trends. We do suggest consulting with industry mentors. Tap into your volunteer and community network for sector-specific insights. Typically, working with volunteers and mentors are incredibly, incredibly helpful.

Last but not least, connect with professional associations. We do encourage you to reach out to associations in relevant industries. They might be able to answer some of your questions, be a valuable resource to support you. By equipping yourself with this knowledge, you position yourself as a trusted bridge between clients and employers, really ensuring stronger matches and more successful placements.

Now we will dive a little bit more into our last component, fourth dimension, which is labor market research. I know all of you on this call are very familiar with this. Doing research will help you learn the job opportunities in your service area, which jobs have talent gaps, which sectors are hurting for employees. By doing this research and locating which jobs have high opportunity, you will then be able to pinpoint potential partners to connect with.

YM: We always suggest to educate yourself on what jobs have high opportunities, specifically in your geographical area. One suggestion would be reading your local Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, or WIOA. We know some of you are very familiar with this. Some of you who are newer on this call might not be as familiar. If you're not familiar with it, it is a really excellent tool that will tell you exactly what kinds of occupations in your area that are expected to grow.

It can also tell you occupations that your state or local area, maybe your county, thinks would be great occupations for low-income working adults to move into and to develop their careers, utilize their skills, talents, education, pretty much everything that they need to move into those careers. We also recommend researching through Bureau of Labor and Statistics. It is an amazing resource with so much useful data; [please] don't disregard this resource.

Next, recognizing indicators of high-demand job. Now, what's it going to look like? A lot of times, it looks like sign-on bonuses. It looks like regularly scheduling interviews, presence of staffing agencies paid to source people for a specific industry because there's just not enough talent—that should be an alarm bell for you that you can swoop in and do some of that work. Last but not least, we also recommend identifying industry-specific staffing services.

3. Best Practices in Job Development

YM: With that, we'll move into our third learning objective, best practices in job development. First, we would want to define what job development is. Job development is a practice of working with key employer partners to identify specific job opportunities that may be a good fit for job seekers. It is not that we create jobs that do not exist. It is that we find jobs that already exist, and then we work with our employer partners to make them truly ideal opportunities for our clients.

YM: What does this process look like? All right. Typically, [the] job development process has four key steps. It always starts with initial outreach to a contact with decision-making power. I want to pause here a little bit. Please notice the specific language. You may initially think that it would be best to speak with an HR manager or HR representative as your initial first contact person. However, speaking with a higher-level executive or manager who has decision-making power can be more beneficial for long-lasting partner relationship.

Someone in this position may be able to make unilateral decision and then potentially direct HR staff to work closely with you, collaborate with you. Even when things are not going well and you might need some kind of change in workplace policy to better accommodate your clients, they may be able to help you through this process. We definitely encourage you to speak with higher-level executives for a more fruitful relationship.

I know it can be scary to speak with someone high up in the ranks, but we are going to talk a little bit more on that. The part of strength-based approach is really believing that you are capable of having those conversations. Now, next, I would love to move to actual initial meeting that might take place in person. It might take place over Zoom, could also be a phone call. For initial meeting, of course, professional attire, office literature, your business cards are always recommended.

YM: Please do take this phase seriously because remembering that you are representative of your clients. You want to present a polished version of yourself so they can take your client seriously. Next step, and a very helpful part of solidifying the new partnership, is to actually set upcoming interviews, making sure that you are responsible for making the process of your clients meeting an employer for an interview as smooth as possible.

Last stage of job development process, after clients are placed in jobs, we always want to emphasize follow-up. Asking employers, how is it going? What is it like working with our candidates? I would love to check in on your hiring needs. Are there any alternative positions available? Would love to help connect you with some of our candidates. We always, always encourage follow-up. All right. I would love to dive a little bit deeper into defining an ideal partner.

YM: When building employer partnerships, it is essential to clearly define what your ideal partner looks like. This ensures your outreach is truly intentional, it aligns with your client's needs, and supports long-term mutually beneficial relationship. Some of the aspects you can see on your screen, let's talk about location. Consider accessibility for clients, including public transportation routes and travel time, so important for so many of our clients.

Now, what are the positions that are available? Want to focus on roles that truly align with client skills, experience, and career pathways, if possible. Now, environment is also really important. We want to look for workplaces that provide a supportive culture for newcomers. Wage range is also important. We want to aim for employers offering wages that meet or hopefully exceed local living wage standards.

YM: Of course, accommodation. We want to identify employers willing to provide language access, potentially flexible schedule, maybe some prayer times, and other necessary job support. By identifying these criteria upfront, you can focus your energy on employers that are most likely to offer high-quality, sustainable opportunities for your clients. Next, we'll move into how to actually find those opportunities.

How do we go about this? Identifying the right opportunities for your clients really requires you to cast a wide net while also tapping into trusted and high-quality sources. Now, using multiple channels increases the chances of finding roles that match your client's needs, interests, and hopefully career goals. Some of those examples, you should be able to see on your screen. Job boards. We want to go into search platforms like Indeed, Glassdoor, or local job sites for posting in targeted industries.

LinkedIn, wonderful LinkedIn. We want to leverage professional networks, company pages, and job alerts to identify some of those openings, and of course, connect with recruiters. You are able to do this on LinkedIn. Volunteer network. Engaging [your] volunteer network is incredibly important. They can share insider knowledge, help you refer candidates, and connect with hiring managers. We also don't want to overlook staffing or recruiting agencies and build strong relationship with the ones that truly understand newcomer needs and offer language accessible placements. Those are rare to find, but we do want to put some efforts into that.

YM: Next, newcomer community network. It is ideal to partner with community leaders and organizations that hear about job openings through word of mouth. Last but not least, of course, friends and family network. We want to encourage clients to leverage personal connections, which very often lead to hidden or unadvertised opportunities. By combining formal job search tools with personal and community networks, you can uncover a broader range of opportunities, including those that may never [have] been posted publicly.

All right. Next, we'll go into components of a strong cold email or LinkedIn pitch. My colleague, Rebecca, is going to be kind enough to put a link for a template that we have developed for cold calls and emails. We recommend, as a first step, for you to utilize this template or potentially another template that your organization might have already developed. This is not only helpful in your conversations, but it also can increase efficiency.

YM: In addition to starting with a template, there are a few other factors that make a strong cold email or LinkedIn pitch. We encourage you to use a targeted approach. Sending an email or call to a person with decision-making power. Again, try to find that person that you have a connection with who has the most ability to make that kind of decision around hiring. Referencing competitors. We encourage you to mention well-known, reputable companies in the same industry who have successfully hired your client.

You can give an example of, “We have partnered with ABC Manufacturing and Delta Industries to fill skilled assembly roles with excellent results.” That signals that other respected employers in your area trust you, which helps reduce uncertainty for a new partner. Next, we're moving into reducing anxieties. Now, we encourage you to address potential concerns upfront, especially around work authorization. In our poll, there were a lot of answers regarding work authorization.

YM: An example could be something along the lines of, “Our candidates are fully work-authorized and available for immediate hire.” It's a short, clear statement that can quickly put employers at ease and keep the conversation moving forward. We also encourage you to request more engagement at specific times. Now, the whole point is to progress to have more and more face time with your employers. Requesting for an in-person or virtual meeting at a specific time is really beneficial.

This is a really old marketing trick: targeted language about [a] specific time and reason for meeting. This will subconsciously prompt someone to think about their calendar and hopefully move forward. Just another tip. Then, last but not least, send polished marketing materials. If you have—and I know a lot of you on this call do have—those glossy one-pagers about the work that you do, please do send it along.

It really helps your partners, your employers, to better understand who you are as an organization and the incredible work that you are doing in the community. Please consider also writing a success story with a quote, maybe from an employer partner that you're working with, and just send that along with the other materials. [A] major challenge may simply be that they just have never heard of you before, and those materials could be incredibly helpful with that.

YM: All right. Then moving into additional preparation for a strong phone pitch. We know that sometimes phone pitching can be scary for people, especially if you are very new to this field, but the more you do it, the less scary it will be. A phone conversation is often a way to form a more interpersonal connection with the employer partner. As you get into this work, I encourage you to try and do this as much as possible. In order to do a strong phone pitch, we can rely on the template that Rebecca has posted in the chat, but few other things to know.

Practice, practice, practice. Speak slowly and naturally. Request and offer an office tour. This really allows you to go back and look for candidates that have a way better idea of the kind of skills, the talents, the competencies that they are looking for. We usually love office tours. Let you get familiar with your employer a little bit more. It allows you to take a look at the hands-on qualifications that are needed at the atmosphere, environment within the facility. We always recommend for you to do so.

YM: Represent client's needs and wants—truly going back to the importance of knowing your clients. I would love to next spend a little time talking about the pitch to large groups. Now, if one-on-one pitches are not really yielding strong results for your organization, we recommend you consider and shift your approach to pitching to larger groups. Now, this method can help you connect with the most prepared and committed partners in one setting.

Why it works. Typically, instead of individually approaching employers, we recommend presenting your services to a broader audience, and let those who are interested and aligned partners come to you. We recommend partnering with your local chamber of commerce, professional associations, or industry groups to secure speaking opportunities. We would love for you to structure your pitch. For example, highlight what your program offers. What is it?

YM: Do you offer recruitment? Do you offer candidate screening? Could it be interview preparation? Does your organization provide onboarding support? We also encourage you to share success stories. This is a perfect opportunity to share those impactful cases. Also, we recommend for you to clearly state your wish list. What is it that you would like to see from employer partners? Opportunities for professional development, for example. Willingness to explore transportation or maybe schedule accommodation, et cetera. We would love for you to dedicate most of your presentation to showcasing value and maybe [a] clear ask at the end. That allows interested employers to follow up with you right away. By positioning yourself in front of larger audiences, you really create opportunities to attract high-quality partners who are ready to engage, at the same time, saving time and increasing the likelihood of strong and long-term collaboration. With that, we will move to our final learning objective, the actual maintenance of employer partnership.

4. Maintaining Employer Relationships: Common Challenges and Strategies for Overcoming Them

YM: I do have another Slido activity for you. Hopefully, you're still keeping it open. If not, please feel free to scan the QR code. The question for this learning objective: what challenges might job development staff, you, encounter when managing employer partnerships? What are the challenges that you typically see when you are working with employer partnership? Disappearing contacts. Again, language barriers. Employer expectation. Please do keep them coming.

Sustainability. Talking about turnover. Capacity. Employer expectations. Meeting the requirements. Tough. Employer is ghosting us. Thank you for sharing that. Ignoring. Very difficult to keep up. Ghosting us. Very true. Very true. Lack of actionable feedback. I so appreciate you posting that. Very true. Not having clarity around hiring guidelines. Again, thank you so much, folks, for your active participation in this activity. I would love to move us into the next phase and really dive into those challenges that most of you just posted in our poll.

YM: Now, I do want to acknowledge that the work that we do is deeply meaningful, but it is also very demanding. Many of those challenges that you have shared with us today, they are very common across our field. They impact both our capacity and also our well-being. Recognizing them openly is really a true first step towards managing them effectively. I would love to dive a little bit more into each of those aspects. A lot of them you have mentioned.

Large caseloads. Now, we know that job development staff often manage many clients and employers at once, which can limit the amount of time available for each client. That is very true. The next, very complex workplace needs. Now, we know that some clients require additional support on the job, such as language assistance, cultural orientation, workplace accommodations. All of that is very true. Next, high employer response expectation.

Now, employers may expect immediate answers to questions or issues, which can really create pressure for the job development staff. Moving into client life challenges. This is also something that a lot of you mentioned. Factors like transportation issues. They have tons of family responsibilities. There could be some health concerns that can affect their ability to be consistently present or on time. Moving into job mismatch. There is not always a direct match between available positions and the skills, experience, and interest of the job seekers.

YM: It is very true. We take on these challenges because, again, this work really matters. We see the difference that it makes in people's life. That sense of purpose truly fuels us. Passion alone is not enough to sustain us long-term in this field. Without clear boundaries, the very dedication that moves us, that drives us, can also fully drain us. That is why our next focus would be on setting professional boundaries.

Why are boundaries so important? I would love for us to define boundaries first. We want to think through having strong boundaries with our employers. We want to have strong relationship with them, but we also want them to be mutually beneficial. In order to do that, we need to make sure that we are setting limits about what is appropriate, safe, and effective behavior. There are a few different kinds of boundaries: professional, relational, physical, work life.

Of course, today we will be talking about professional boundaries. Next, we'll move into the conversation of why the boundaries with employers are crucially important. Boundaries are not walls. Truly, they are the framework that allows us to work effectively, protect our clients, and maintain strong, sustainable relationship. We will start with building trust and mutual respect. Boundaries really create a professional environment where both you and your employer or partner feel safe, valued, and respected.

YM: Next, we'll move into empowering your employer. We suggest clearly defining where your role ends and where theirs begins. This empowers employers to step up in the areas of responsibility while respecting the scope of your work. Next, we want to provide legal protection. Boundaries ensure upfront conversations [about] employer responsibilities. We want to focus on providing safe and harassment-free workplace. You can support your clients to file a formal complaint, of course, but it remains in the employer legal's obligation to address it.

Next, we'll move into equitable service delivery. Without boundaries, you truly risk devoting disproportional time to that one employer. It might be at the expense of others, which can unintentionally disadvantage some of your clients. You want to be careful about that. Next, moving into protecting your organization's reputation. Overpromising and under-delivering truly erodes credibility. Boundaries really help set realistic commitment and can consistently meet.

YM: The last but not least, the burnout, something that we already touched based on. Sustainable practices like avoiding, for example, constant early morning drives to job sites. It really keeps your workload manageable and your energy intact. We want you to really be considerate of that. Boundaries are not really about saying no to being helpful. They are about saying yes to doing the work well for a long term and in a way that serves all clients fairly. They keep our partnerships strong and our services high-quality. Of course, hopefully, our team's healthy.

All right. Next, I would love to review a few examples with you. The question that we get from the providers quite often: “So, how do we set those boundaries without sounding rude?” It truly is an art. In general, when you are trying to set boundaries, but also maintain that relationship, this format might support you. I would love to go over guidelines first, and then just dive a little bit more into some of the examples from our partners.

YM: General guidelines would be, we want to validate their concern, we want to set the limit, we want to provide an explanation, and offer an alternative. One example of this could be, "I understand that you'd like to schedule an interview tomorrow. Unfortunately, I'm unable to source candidates for you with that turnaround. I would be happy to send you some resumes today and ask these candidates to interview next week." Sounds like they covered all of the points of our guidelines.

Next, "Thank you for letting me know that this employee is having car trouble, and did not come to work today. I am sorry for the impact of the workday. I am sure that was stressful. I have meetings and cannot really provide a transportation solution for this employee right now, but I will call them and give you an update by end of the day." Both of these examples, they truly validated the concern, they set the limit, they provided an explanation, and they also offered an alternative at the end. I encourage you to think of those examples and potentially use them in your workday as well.

Next, we would move into “How do I set those expectations with employers?” When we set clear expectations from the start, again, we lay a strong foundation for great partnership and healthy boundaries. We always want to encourage you to first use partnership language. For example, you could say something like, "We are happy to provide customized job readiness workshops for new hires, but as partners, we need you to ensure bilingual supervisors are available during onboarding period."

YM: This is a situation that a lot of our early employment programs are in. Or another example, "We are happy to offer cultural competency training for your management team, but as partners, we need you to identify a point of contact who can help integrate the training into daily operations." That frames the relationship as collaborative rather than transactional. Next, please do outline the services that your organization does. What is it that you do? Resume and interview preparation. Highlight job readiness and [inaudible] classes. Talk about onboarding support for employers. Workplace cultural orientation for clients.

We do so much on a daily basis. Please don't hesitate to highlight this. Moving into reminding them that newcomers have all the same complexities as U.S.-born job seekers. Again, using the strength-based lens, but be upfront. For example, you could say something like, "With any new hire, there can be a period of adjustment. We will stay in regular contact with you to identify and resolve any issues early and work together towards long-term success."

Next, we'll explain your work environment. Don't hesitate to let them know that you do have high caseloads. Something along the lines of, "I might not be able to respond immediately, but I will always get back to you within 24 hours. Email is the best way to reach me." Something along those lines. Next, please do— Talking a little bit about the learning curve. We want you to acknowledge that early placement often comes with adjustments for both the employer and employee.

YM: Reassure your employer partners that you will help them navigate this period. Last but not least, describe how and when they can expect to contact you. Again, that goes back to boundaries and clear expectations. Set clear guidance for communication channels, availability, and response time. Clear expectations are not just about avoiding misunderstanding. They truly create trust. They set a professional tone, and ensure both sides know how to work together towards those shared goals.

Moving us into the last portion of our learning objective, I would love to remind you how to maintain employer partnership. Just some easy, applicable steps. Most of you already implementing all of them. For some of you, it might be a nice reminder. Setting up a monthly follow-up. Scheduling your calendar…reminders to check in with your employer partners, we recommend at least once a month. Keep it light, not just transactional, but relationship-focused.

Another important aspect, do not hesitate to invite your employers to your events. Could be advocacy events, could be volunteer events. That really gives them a deeper connection to your mission, to your organization, and to the community. We also recommend [an] employer advisory council. Invite leaders in key industries to join. Ask for their highlights. Ask for labor market trends, candidate preparation. Also, do not hesitate to connect with their professional colleagues.

YM: Ask partners to introduce you to their larger professional network potentially. Warm introductions really often open doors a lot faster than cold calls. Then, one of the really important aspects to not forget, please do share your wins. Stay visible. Include employers in your newsletters, social media posts, and success story highlights. Public recognition truly builds loyalty and reinforces the value of the relationship. Overall, building and sustaining employer partnership is not just about job placement.

It truly is about cultivating trust, mutual value, and long-term collaboration. When we communicate clearly, set those healthy boundaries, and follow through consistently, we really create a foundation where both employers and job seekers can thrive. As we move forward, we recommend for you to approach each partnership with intention, empathy, and commitment. With that, we concluded our slide deck portion of the presentation.

YM: Now, we have allotted some time for Q&A session. I want to thank all of you who submitted your questions ahead of today's webinar. In this presentation, we were already able to address a lot of them. I have printed out a few of them that we were not able to address. I would like to spend a few minutes on this. One of the questions, how do you keep clients with no English and no work skills because they lived in a refugee camp? How do you help them?

For clients with no English and limited formal work experience, we always recommend starting by identifying their transferable skills. We know that a lot of you already focusing on that. Life skills that they gained in other contexts. Even from camp life, things like problem-solving, teamwork, or even potentially food preparation, that could be very valuable. Then we suggest looking for entry-level jobs that build in training [and] language-learning opportunities, ideally with bilingual mentors or visual tools.

YM: It is really important to focus on employer partners who understand newcomer needs and can offer face onboarding or potentially a buddy system. We do have a lot of employers that offer that. Wrap-around services, supports like transportation, child care, can definitely help the client focus on learning as well. The goal isn't to just get them a job. The goal is to build skills and confidence for a long-term success. I think we might have a little more time to answer a few more.

The next question is how to repair an employer relationship after a negative incident? There were quite a few questions on this. If there is a negative incident, we at Switchboard recommend first acknowledging the employer's concerns and clarifying exactly what had happened by talking with everyone involved. Then we recommend offer a clear resolution. Whether that is an extra client preparation. It might look as close a follow-up. It also might look like replacing a candidate.

We suggest reinforcing that shared goal of long-term relationship and successful placement. Follow-up is crucial in incidents like this. We always recommend follow-up right after the fix. Ideally, this would ensure the relationship remains positive and continues long-term. One last question that I have here, what are the ways to work with American job centers in their engagement with employers? I love this question. We always recommend building a relationship with business service team at the local American job centers.

YM: Really, they are truly the ones connecting with employers every day. We would love for you to make sure that they know the types of candidates that you work with, so our pipeline, the support that your organization offers, and the industries that you are targeting. Co-hosting hiring events has always been very successful, and sharing those employer leads—that can strengthen the partnership for both. The goal is to be part of the employee engagement strategy so you can tap into opportunities that they are already developing, and they're so good at it.

This is a perfect partnership for any of us immigrant, refugee-serving organizations. That would be it for our questions for the day. With that, I would love to just dive back into learning objectives. Hopefully, today, the training was able to highlight important parts of employer partnerships for you. For learning objective number one, we were able to describe the importance of employer partnership. Hopefully, now you are able to identify key consideration and benefits for both.

YM: Also, hopefully, you are able to implement best practice job development, and last but not least, recognize those common challenges in maintaining employer partnership. My colleague, Rebecca, just posted our Switchboard satisfaction survey. Before we move on to recommended sources, I would like to ask you to help us help you. This survey is extremely important for us as we collect your feedback. I ask you to scan this QR code. Our survey is only five questions long and should not take you more than 60 seconds to complete.

We'll just encourage you to do this right now before we share all of our resources.

[pause]

YM: Wonderful. Thank you so much, everybody. Again, your feedback is incredibly important for us. Some of the recommended resources that we would like to share with you. Switchboard tool—this is something that Rebecca shared in the chat. Switchboard blog post that goes through five mapping strategies for employer outreach" might be helpful for you. There is a short video with four tips for effective employer conversation.

YM: We also would love for you to have our Switchboard guide on supporting clients during times of economic hardship, and also ORR Funding Opportunity's Employer Engagement Program. All of this will be shared with you. For more training and technical assistance, stay connected with Switchboard. I would love for you to email us at switchboard@rescue.org. Visit us at www.SwitchboardTA.org. That is how you can subscribe to our newsletter.

Also, follow us on social media @SwitchboardTA. Once you subscribe to our newsletter, keep an eye out on the announcement of a new webinar that is coming in September, "Building Employer Partnerships to Support Low English Proficiency Job Seekers," where we will continue to take a deep dive into employer partnership and review a case study from one of our employer partners. This should be exciting. On behalf of all of us at Switchboard, I thank you for learning with us, and we hope to see you again very soon. Have a wonderful rest of your day.

The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.