

Building Employer Partnerships to Support Low English Proficiency Job Seekers

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Yana Mann (YM): Hello, hello, and welcome everyone to today's webinar. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Yana Mann, and I'm a Program Officer with the International Rescue Committee's Technical Unit, where I support economic empowerment programs across the IRC network. I've spent the past seven years advancing workforce development effort in [the] Sacramento IRC office, helping refugees and immigrant access career pathways and achieve economic stability. In my current role, I support national economic empowerment projects through Switchboard, providing technical assistance that strengthens service delivery for refugee-serving organizations.

It is my pleasure to dive into our learning goals for today. First, we will describe the critical role of strategic employer partnership in expanding job opportunities for LEP job seekers. Next, we will move into identifying mutual benefits for employers and LEP newcomers and key considerations for building and sustaining effective hiring partnerships. Once we've done that, we will move into applying best practice job development strategies that prioritize language-accessible roles, align with client skills and goals, and promote those long-term employment success.

Finally, we will recognize and implement strategies to overcome common challenges in engaging and retaining those employer partners willing to hire LEP job seekers.

1. The Role of Employer Partnerships: Placing Low English Proficiency (LEP) Job Seekers in High-Quality Jobs

YM: Let's get started with our first learning objective. I'd like to start with talking about the role of employer partnerships in placing LEP job seekers in those high-quality jobs. Now, we know that there's no high-quality jobs without high-quality employer partnership. We also know that each one of you are in very different places when building out your employer partnership networks.

Today, we will start and focus on common barriers and way to overcome them. In order to do that, I would love to get us started with Slido. We are hoping for a really interactive session today. There are a lot of us on this call, so if you don't mind either going to slido.com and putting in the code, or simply scanning the QR code that will take you to our Slido activities for today. First question I would like to pose would be, what barriers do employer partners face with low English proficiency job seekers?

I invite you for this question to think really broadly. Beautiful. We have some questions coming in. Communication barriers. Communication. Absolutely. Lack of translators, working papers. We're seeing communication, hard to train, training, understanding HR training, safety concerns. We're seeing communications numerous times. Processes are too confusing. Language barrier is always there. Wonderful. Thank you so much. We're going to give it 30 more seconds just to see what you are seeing across the board. Safety, communication seems to be some of the most dominant ones there.

YM: Policies, cultural differences. Transportation, of course. Training barriers. Absolutely. I thank you for sharing your thoughts on barriers that are there. I want to acknowledge that hearing these perspectives are incredibly important because it reminds us that employers and job seekers are navigating challenges from both sides. Our ultimate goal, to bridge those gaps and to support employers in building those really strong, sustainable partnerships and to ensure that job seekers with limited English proficiency can access quality jobs that lead to stability.

Thank you so much, everyone. I would love to move us forward and actually take a deeper dive on the importance of securing a quality job. Regardless of where you are starting, [the] ultimate goal of the relationships that we will be discussing today is to connect our job seekers to quality jobs that meet their basic needs and set them up for success. There are several main points that I would like to zoom in [on]. Food and housing security. Let's start there. That is the most immediate and tangible needs that stable income typically supports. Moving to household essentials. Here we can put transportation, clothing, utilities, other costs that maintain daily lifestyle.

Moving into another important aspect, health insurance. Most people in the United States rely on employer-based coverage, which is essential for long-term well-being. Next, we move into social connections and capital. Now, we know that jobs expand networks, build relationship, and they also improve both physical and economic outcomes. Of course, we cannot overlook ESL. The workforce can be one of the most effective environments for improving our clients' language skills. Moving into dignity and purpose. Reliable employment always offers structure, self-worth, and can be protective factor for mental health, especially for so many trauma survivors that all of us are working with.

YM: Last but not least, we want to mention compliance with ORR self-sufficiency requirements. Many of you on this call are funded by ORR, and we want to make sure we're helping clients achieve self-sufficiency quickly. Employer partnership make it very possible for us. I just want to note that also quality job is more than a paycheck. It is a cornerstone for stability, health, and integration. The stronger your employer partnerships are, the more effective we can connect clients to the kinds of jobs that truly support self-sufficiency and long-term success.

I would love to dive a little bit into the statistics. It is really important to understand broader workforce landscape for limited English [proficiency] job seekers, and data paints a very clear picture of why it matters. Right now, we are looking at about 19.5 million working-age adults in the United States aged 16 to 64 who are limited English-proficient. That is roughly 10% of the entire workforce. Despite their skills and potential, LEP workers earn between 25% to 40% less than their English-proficient peers. Now, these lower wages reflect more than just individual circumstances.

They reveal systemic barriers to economic mobility, from limited access to quality jobs to fewer opportunities for advancement, unfortunately. This is the backdrop against which we are building employer partnership, and that is why your work is so essential. By understanding these disparities, we can be more intentional in designing employer engagement strategies that hopefully open doors for fair wages, growth opportunities, and long-term success for our clients. Today, we will be

reviewing a case study from one of the immigrant and refugee-serving CBOs in Sacramento, California.

YM: Ahmad arrived in Sacramento in 2023 with his wife and two young children after serving as a heavy equipment operator for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Now, with limited English proficiency but very extensive experience operating heavy vehicles overseas, Ahmad is hoping to pursue a career in transportation to provide stability for his family. To do this in California, he is required to have a Commercial Driver's License. I would like to note that Sacramento is home to the largest Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders community in the United States.

Unfortunately, local CDL providers are not truly equipped to support LEP job seekers. One local CDL provider achieved only 20% CDL test pass rate among LEP clients. Now, while Ahmad is eager to get a job in transportation, he doesn't really know what's the proper way to study for the testing, what steps he needs to take to obtain his CDL. I would love to have a group brainstorming session, getting to know Ahmad's stories. What barriers can you identify that Ahmad is facing in this situation? Language barrier. Unfamiliarity with the English language. Training opportunities. Lack of knowledge of U.S. traffic laws.

YM: Absolutely. Executive order now requiring English test for truck drivers. Exactly. Language, culture, case management, or contact for help. Absolutely. There are cultural barriers. Training materials in his own language. Absolutely. Not familiar with U.S. laws. Unable to self-advocate. Language. Absolutely. Culture assessment, limited knowledge. Absolutely. Thank you so much, folks, for actively participating and identifying the barriers that Ahmad is facing. Now, many of them, those barriers that you identified, are the same ones faced by LEP job seekers more broadly.

I would love to take a deeper dive into those. We know that to create effective employer partnerships, we need to understand the real challenges that we are dealing with that our clients face on daily basis when trying to enter and advance in the workplace. Now, these barriers aren't just individual obstacles. They are very often systemic, and they shape the way we approach our job development process. Some of the key points are language and communication. That's exactly what you identified. That is the most visible barrier. Many LEP job seekers struggle to understand job descriptions, applications, safety protocols, and may have difficulty advocating for accommodations or promotions if they need them.

YM: Misunderstandings during onboarding processes, during training can make it a lot harder for them to succeed from day one. Next, let's move into credential recognition and limited work experience. Also very valid. Unfortunately, foreign degrees or certifications often aren't accepted in the United States, [thus] forcing highly skilled individuals into entry-level roles outside of their field. Now, this leads to underemployment and lost potential. Next, we'll move into limited access to workforce networks that also plays a huge role.

Without professional networks here in the United States or referrals, our clients often rely solely on community or family connections, which can be very limited. Moving into the next aspect and the barrier, transportation and geographic barriers. For so many of our clients, this is a significant barrier, especially for those living in areas with poor public transit. Jobs in suburban industrial zones or with irregular shifts may

also be simply out of reach for so many of LEP workers. Moving to limited knowledge of workplace rights and resources.

YM: Without clear knowledge of labor laws, and this is something a lot of you mentioned, or anti-discrimination policies, and sometimes, with a fear of speaking up, unsafe and unfair conditions may go unreported, and that is always a challenge for the population that we are working with. Finally, we cannot overlook digital literacy gaps. They are becoming increasingly critical from online applications to virtual job interviews, job seekers without access to devices or reliable internet, or at times, without the skills to even navigate those systems, they face major, major disadvantages.

Understanding those barriers truly helps us build more inclusive employer partnerships and advocate for workplace practices that remove those obstacles and hopefully open opportunities for LEP job seekers. Let's talk a little bit on why it is important to rely on employer partnerships. One of the most effective ways to bridge the barriers that you just identified would be through strong and intentional partnerships. Now, employer partnerships give us access to first-language accessible opportunities. They open doors to workplace where roles are matched to LEP job seekers' skills and where communication supports are in place.

Now, they also give us the ability to negotiate onboarding and retention supports for anywhere from bilingual mentors that a lot of you are working with, to visual training tools that so many offices have designed, to flexible onboarding timelines to set employees up for success. Next, we can move into working directly with employers, speed up and improve placements. Instead of relying solely on job boards or cold applications, when we have an employer partnership, we can streamline this hiring process and match candidates to the roles that are more likely to lead to long-term retention.

YM: Finally, partnerships give us an opportunity to influence job quality. Close relationship with employers means we can advocate for the safe and supportive as well as sustainable work environments that benefit both the LEP employees and the business as a whole. Employer partnerships [are] definitely more than just a hiring pipeline. They are a tool for creating accessible, supportive, and high-quality job opportunities. They drive long-term success for our clients. Let's take somewhat of a closer look at these barriers and some of the suggested solutions. Hopefully, it can speak with all of you on this call.

The barrier of language and communication gaps we can typically address with bilingual mentors or staff, translated materials that so many of your offices successfully have done, visual onboarding tools, also another very helpful tool. To address credential recognition challenges, [a] potential solution could be employers willing to value international experience, or there's an opportunity to support credential conversation and hopefully evaluation of the degrees. Next barrier, limited workforce networks, potentially could be addressed with internal referral pipelines and access to industry connections through our CBOs.

Next, for transportation barriers that so many of our clients face on regular basis, a lot of your offices already offering a carpool option that came through the partnership with your local employers. There might be a shuffle services and also potentially

conversations on shift adjustments if possible. Next barrier, lack of workplace rights awareness. Also, a lot of you on this call have conducted joint orientation on labor rights and protections, working hand-in-hand with your local employers. Last but not least, digital literacy gaps. A lot of time, we are able to provide on-the-job digital training or pre-employment digital skills workshops.

2. Key Considerations and Mutual Benefits for Employers and LEP Job Seekers

YM: With this, I'll move us to our second learning objective. Let's talk a little bit more on key considerations and mutual benefits for employers and LEP job seekers. Wonderful. I would love to pose another question for you. Now that we reviewed those general phases of building employer partnership, I would like to invite you to zoom in a little bit. We were talking about common barriers. Let's see if we can zoom in and think more specifically. What difficulties might employers encounter at an early stage? What are some of those difficulties? Misaligned expectations, increased training expenses. Very good.

Team building may be more difficult with language barriers. Adaptation, very valid. We are seeing cultural differences, onboarding paperwork, lack of experiences there. Training. No work history in the United States. Cultural orientation is a key. Interpretation cost. Wonderful. Expensive training, language, lack of sensitivity. Beautiful. Thank you so much, everyone, for sharing those observations. I would love to move us forward and share a beautiful quote. This quote is from International Institute of New England: "Local employers describe hiring refugees and immigrant as a win-win. They know they're getting employees with incredible work ethics who will strengthen the culture of their company."

YM: This quote truly captures why employer partnerships with LEP job seekers, refugees, and immigrants are often so successful. For many employers, hiring newcomers is not an act of charity. It is a smart business decision. They gain reliable, motivated workers with strong work ethics who help reduce turnover and fill critical labor gaps. Employers also see how newcomer employees strengthen workplace culture. There are a lot of you that mentioned cultural aspects. Promote diversity and contribute to a positive team environment. This win-win dynamic is the foundation of sustainable partnerships. Employers gain a loyal, skilled workforce, and LEP job seekers access meaningful employment and stability.

Let's go ahead and dive into our employer perspective and some of the common concerns that you also mentioned. Even when employer partnership can be a win-win, employers often have very real and very practical concerns about hiring LEP job seekers. A lot of you mentioned communication and training needs. Employers may worry that language barriers will affect productivity. This is very valid. Safety instructions or day-to-day supervision. They also anticipate that ongoing LEP employees might require additional training. That is also something a lot of you mentioned in the Slido.

Next, workforce reliability and safety. Many of you mentioned safety. Businesses definitely need confidence that new hires will arrive on time, follow procedures, and meet safety standards, especially in industries like manufacturing, construction, [and] health care, where compliance is very critical. Last but not least, a lot of you also

mentioned retention and cost. Hiring and training new employees is expensive. Employers are concerned that if placement does not last, they will have to restart the recruitment process all over again, which again increases costs and disrupts operations.

YM: Acknowledging all of these concerns openly helps us address them proactively and position our clients as a solution rather than a risk. I invite you to think through the opposite side. We just explored some of the challenges. I would love for you to now think through how employers can benefit from working with your organization to hire newcomer talent. Let's dive into those benefits that you are seeing. Save money and time, better workforce, diversity, support and translation, interpretation services, incredible work ethics. Love it. Great work ethics. Free resources. Eager to learn new job skills. Case management.

Additional help with their workers. Cultural diversity. Future diverse hires. Gain multicultural employees. Wonderful. Willingness to learn and work hard. Absolutely. Thank you so much again for your active participation. There are benefits of hiring the clients, working with you as an organization, and saving money. Absolutely. It is our job to really become well-versed in talking about the skills and talents that our clients have.

I would love to share another quote with you from UNHCR. "Refugee hires often exhibit lower turnover rates, exactly what you mentioned, reducing recruitment costs and improving workforce stability. In one study, 73% of surveyed employers reported higher retention among refugee employees than with their general workforce."

YM: One of the clearest benefits that you mentioned, also when hiring refugees and LEP job seekers, is loyalty and retention. In fact, there are many studies that show that refugee hires often exhibit lower turnover rates, providing employers with stable, reliable workforce. This loyalty often translates into reduced recruitment and training costs for your employers. It also builds confidence for employers to continue hiring those newcomers.

At the same time, LEP workers gain access to very meaningful work, develop their skills, and achieve stabilities. When both sides benefit, partnerships truly become sustainable. Beautiful. I would love to go ahead and move into the value your community-based organization brings to employers. Some of the main points, aspects that a lot of you on this call [are] able to provide—let's go ahead and start with English as second language. Wonderful. By offering ESL, your organization helps employees build the language skills that they need to succeed on the job, which in turn strengthens communication, safety, and retention, just like we mentioned.

Next, community-based organization like yours bring real value to employers during onboarding and training. You not only help new hires adjust and adapt more quickly and confidently, you help navigate forms, schedules, policies, expectations. You also ease the employer's workload by making the process smoother and more compliant for them. Many of you also provide cultural competency. We've seen a lot of those. Competency training for employees, supervisors. A lot of you have bilingual mentors or staff using visual training tools, flexible onboarding timelines, et cetera.

YM: These supports ultimately save employers time and resources. Next, a lot of your organizations also support clients in earning industry-recognized certifications by combining technical training with bridge programming that addresses English language and also academic skills gaps. This dual approach really helps our clients not only pass exams but also gain the confidence to apply their skills in real-world workplace setting. We also have tailored job readiness training and advancement training for our workers. This might include workplace communication, leadership skills, industry-specific training.

Also, for some of you that prepare employees to move into higher-skilled roles, supporting both career mobility for workers and retention for your employers. Then moving into digital literacy training. This is incredibly essential for our clients to learn to navigate those online applications. Again, workplace software, some of the digital tools that your employer might have. For many LEP job seekers, this is a very critical step to participate fully in the training programs that your employer provides, communicate effectively at work, and compete in today's technology-driven market.

Just as ESL classes build that foundation for communication and success on the job, CBO-led training programs like bridge certification programs, job readiness, digital literacy—it all takes that foundation further, opening doors to advancement and long-term career growth. For a moment, let's go back to our case study. Ahmad connects with a local CBO, hoping he can find support for obtaining his commercial driver license. The CBO's employment specialist enrolls Ahmad into the organization's career pathways program. He also conducts successful employer engagement with Easy Truck Rental School that is owned by a former refugee himself who truly understands the challenges of entering the U.S. workforce.

YM: [An] employment specialist then refers Ahmad to the CDL partner. Easy Truck Rental is very unique as it serves as both a training provider and an employer offering immediate job opportunities for training program graduates. What exactly this particular CBO was able to do to support both Easy Truck Rental employer and training partner, and Ahmad, their client—there are several interventions that took place here. First, facilitated employer recognized multicultural instruction for certification in Dari, Arabic, and Russian, and Ukrainian. Now, because of such strong partnership and CBO's advocacy that took place, Easy Truck Rental was able to hire multiple instructors that speak different languages.

Many instructions took place in English but is always followed by a more in-depth explanation in their native language, which made the learning process a lot more efficient. Next, they supported fostering culturally inclusive classroom environment. Many of you mentioned inclusivity, cultural awareness. This particular CBO was able to encourage sharing experiences and creating space for true peer learning, where clients are able to study together. They would quiz each other on a regular basis. Especially now, so many of you mentioned some of the changes.

We know that for commercial drivers, now they do have to prove their English proficiency. This particular model continued to prove very effective. Another aspect, together, the CBO and Easy Truck Rental also encourage and continuously have cultural celebrations in the facility. They acknowledge different holidays and important community events. They are also known in the community for conducting

potlucks with dishes from different cultures on ongoing basis, thus creating an incredibly warm and friendly environment for LEP job seekers and learners.

YM: Last but not least, employment specialists would conduct personalized coaching and weekly check-ins to monitor progress and address challenges through the training and onboarding process as they occur. By doing this, this CBO was able to foster a true win-win partnership. Beautiful. This case study demonstrates that employer partnerships truly work best when they create real value for both sides. It is not just about filling open positions. It is truly about building relationship where both employer and the job seeker can benefit. When we approach partnerships with this mindset, we truly create conditions for long-term success.

I would love for you to take a look at this Venn diagram. Let's explore [the] left circle that is blue for employer benefits. Now, we see that employers gain reliable and motivated workers who often demonstrate strong retention. Next, partnerships can help employers reduce turnover and fill those hard-to-staff roles in high-demand industries like transportation or healthcare. They also receive onboarding and training support, making it easier to integrate LEP employees successfully. Those are employer benefits. Let's move and take a look at the right circle, the orange one.

LEP employee benefits. Our clients typically gain access to opportunities that they might not reach on their own without this partnership. They also develop skills and workplace confidence, improving future employability, and their successful placements provide a pathway to stability and economic mobility for newcomers and their families. Let's just go ahead and take a look at how they overlap, sort of a partnership sweet spot. When both sides benefit, we see sustainable placements that last. We also see retention rates again improve because the job and the employees are well-matched.

YM: We also know that this builds mutual trust and long-term relationship, making future hiring and collaboration even easier. When employer and employee needs align, everyone wins. The client gains a stable job, the employer gains a dedicated worker, and we strengthen our community. Beautiful. I would love to take a closer look. Partnering with community-based organizations is more than a hiring solution for employers. It should be a strategic workforce investment. Employers truly gain access to prescreened, job-ready candidates while receiving ongoing support that reduces risk and saves time for them.

These partnerships allow businesses to meet staffing needs efficiently while improving, again, retention and productivity. We'll start with faster and easier recruitment. We provide candidates that are already screened, trained, and authorized to work. Very important. Next, moving into retention and reduced turnover. With bilingual support that a lot of our organizations are equipped to provide, additional job coaching, training assistance, employees are more likely to stay and succeed. Next, moving into increased productivity. Job-ready employees contribute faster, and CBO supports eases that learning curve for them.

Moving to access to multilingual workforce with cross-cultural perspective. Now, employers benefit, a lot of you mentioned, multicultural, multilingual employees who bring adaptability and problem-solving skills. Moving to lower training burden. By providing pre-employment preparation and onboarding support, we minimize the

employer's time investment, which is really important for them. We also build long-term partnerships with ongoing coaching and retention support, and that helps employers keep a very reliable workforce while ensuring that their employees thrive in their role.

YM: Ultimately, employer partnerships with CBO create a, again, win-win relationship. Businesses receive dependable, skilled workers, and job seekers gain meaningful work that supports their need to thrive. Let's go ahead and take a deeper look into LEP employee benefits for employer partnerships. Our clients benefit most when employer partnership is strong. Some of the most important aspects, access to meaningful, stable jobs that match skills and experience. Now, employer partnerships create pathways to jobs aligned with skills and prior experience, which many clients might not have access otherwise.

Supportive onboarding. Bilingual coaching. Again, you do have so many bilingual staff in your organizations. Visual tools, step-by-step training truly helps adjust quickly. Opportunities to learn English and improve communication skills. Moving into professional development. A lot of you mentioned professional development, opportunities for training, certifications. They truly build career potential, and it's not just a short-term employment. Next, retention and long-term success. Ongoing support from CBOs truly helps resolve those workplace challenges early, promoting stability and loyalty to employers.

Last but not least, long-term employment support. Our main goal is that client moves from the first hire to sustained employment with confidence and opportunities for advancement. When our clients experience a well-supported employment journey, everyone truly benefits. Employers gain loyal and productive team members. Job seekers achieve professional growth and economic stability.

3. Best Practices in Job Development

YM: All right. Moving on to our third section, let's talk a little bit more about actual job development. Before we do so, let me go ahead and define what job development is. Typically, it is defined as a practice of working with key employer partners to identify specific job opportunities that may be a good fit for job seekers. It's important to know that it's not that we are creating jobs that don't exist. It is that we find jobs that are already there, and then we work with our employer partners to make them really ideal opportunities for our clients. I invite you to take a look at the next question.

I would love to get your thoughts on what are the qualities of your ideal employer partner. Good communication. Understanding, flexible, and open to employee needs. Beautiful. Understanding of LEP. Former refugee and immigrant. Open to train. Cultural awareness. Empathetic. Open-minded. Respectful. Provides resources. Very crucial. Again, communication, cultural humility, development path in place. Supportive, responsive. I love that you mentioned that. Will to hire new Americans. Open-minded. Committed to the mission. Patience. Patient and resourceful.

I really appreciate your active participation here. Fair pay. Absolutely. Absolutely. Let's go ahead and dive into defining those ideal employer partners together. It is

critical to know exactly what we are looking for in an employer partner. This helps us target our efforts, avoid mistakes, and focus on building lasting partnerships that benefit both the employer and our clients. Let's take a look at some of those things that you have mentioned.

YM: I would like to also include location. Location seems to be really important for LEP workers, proximity to where our clients live, or to possibly public transportation routes, as transportation continues to be an issue for a lot of our clients. We want to consider rural versus urban job sites. We want to be respectful of commuting time for our clients, et cetera.

Next, positions that are available. We want to match two clients' skills and career goals. Ultimately, we want to look for opportunities with career pathways, not just entry-level positions. A lot of you mentioned environment. Supportive workplace culture is incredibly important. Willingness from an employer to accommodate some of the language needs is also crucial. Commitment to safe and inclusive work practices. We also want to talk a little bit about wage range. Some of you mentioned fair pay. We definitely want, in an ideal partner, to see the fact that they meet or exceed local living wage benchmarks and offers potential for raises, benefits, advancements. All of that make an ideal partner.

Last but not least, accommodation. A lot of you mentioned language access, potentially, maybe interpreters, maybe bilingual supervisors. Having some translated onboarding materials would also be incredibly helpful. Flexible onboarding and training practices for our clients. Some of the strongest partnerships truly come [from] within our own communities, like in our example for case study. Some of you also mentioned it's wonderful to work with employers that are refugees and immigrants themselves. These employers often understand firsthand those challenges that our clients face on a daily basis because they have also lived through them.

YM: Partnering with them can create this very powerful cycle of opportunity and community investment. This was exactly the case with our CDL Transportation Partnership. The business owner of this company is a refugee from Afghanistan themselves, and they understood firsthand all of the challenges that LEP job seekers face. By offering multicultural instructions, visual tools, creating buddy system, creating this warm, incredibly welcoming environment, they created a loyal and long-term talent pipeline.

I would love to move us into next phase of job development process. Now that we understand mutual benefits, let's talk a little bit more about practical steps of job development. Now, typically, there are about four phases of job development. Let's take a closer look. Initial outreach to a contact with a decision-making power, ideally. Moving to initial meeting in person or via video conference, whatever works for you and your employer. Next, interviews are typically arranged, and initial clients are placed with this new employer. Last but not least, follow-up and re-engagement for additional job opportunities.

I would like, together, take a deeper dive into each of them. Let's talk a little bit about outreach. The first step in job development is making contact with the right person, someone who can actually make hiring decisions. You approach them. Once you

approach them, they can potentially open the doors, and those doors can stay open for continuous collaboration. Some of the main points that we do during initial outreach, we research target employers in advance, learn about the industry, learn about hiring needs, whether they have a history of hiring LEP candidates. For example, health care employers, typically, certified nursing assistant, clinical medical assistant, dental assistant, they usually have very high hiring needs for LEP workers.

YM: Next, identify contacts with hiring decision-making authority. Could be HR managers, could be hiring supervisors, sometimes business owners. Avoid getting stuck at this gatekeeper level. Try different venues, try different resources, different people within the company. Use multiple outreach channels. We encourage you to continue to use LinkedIn, your volunteer network, staffing recruiting agencies that you have in your area, newcomer community network, friends, and family network. Different channels would work for different employers.

Last but not least, leverage those warm introductions. There's nothing better than a referral from someone the employer already knows and trusts to increase likelihood of a positive response. In [the] Sacramento partnership, it actually started with this community-based organization employment specialist introduction to the owner by a client who was also a leader in the newcomer business community. That warm introduction sets the stage for an open conversation right away and eventually a partnership that transformed their hiring needs.

This step is more about just making a contact. It's truly about creating a strong, trust-based entry point that can lead to lasting employer relationship. Let's move to the next phase of interview and initial placement. There you go, initial meeting. Once you have made this connection, the initial meeting is your opportunity to truly learn and start building a foundation of trust with employer. We'd love for you to focus on building trust and rapport.

YM: Start by showing genuine interest in the employer's business and acknowledging their experience. Be truly interested in getting to know them. Understand their operations and workforce needs. Ask about production cycles, turnover challenges, what are the required skills, and any upcoming hiring plans. Ask to visit their facility to observe. Next, do share client strengths and available supports. Highlight reliability, adaptability, and skills that your clients have, as well as resources that you, as a CBO, offer, such as ESL classes, ongoing assistance, transportation, potentially, translation support, everything that you are so great at.

Use success stories to address concerns. Please do not be shy to share some of those successes. Show how similar partnerships have worked in practice to build that confidence. Do not be humble. Share those incredible stories. We know you have them. In our example of a case study, in this transportation partnership, Sacramento employment specialists focused their first meeting on understanding why this particular employer and training partner was struggling to retain their drivers. This opened the door to proposing multilingual training and body systems which directly address their challenges.

The goal of this meeting is not to close the deal on the spot. It is to listen, uncover, and truly understand employer needs. Beautiful. Next phase, interview and initial placement. After you build trust and [identify] a really good match, the next step is

interview arrangements and your initial placement of clients. We would love for you to focus on truly prepared candidates for interview. Do offer coaching on those interview questions. Mock interviews that a lot of you are so wonderful at. Workplace expectations conversations. Company culture. Tailor preparation to language levels.

YM: Of course, go over U.S. workplace norms. Advocate for accessible interview formats. Maybe suggesting interpreters in certain cases. Potentially incorporating some of the toolkits, some of the visual aids, or maybe skills demonstration instead of purely verbal interviews when appropriate. Maintain close communication during those early—early placement. Check in with both the employer and the candidate to ensure onboarding is going smoothly.

Next, addressing issues promptly. We want to resolve misunderstandings or some of the skill gaps that might happen early to build employer confidence and to prevent that turnover. In our example of the case study, Sacramento employment specialists helped prepare, first, clients' resumes, then conducted interview prep. Once placed, he met with the employer. Very, very early stages of the placements, they were able to work on some of the basic requirements, go over some of the onboarding that is needed to make sure that everything is going very smooth.

This hands-on approach gave candidates the confidence to succeed and led to consistent pipelines of clients. A successful first placement builds the employer trust and created that momentum for additional hiring opportunities in the future. One of the last steps that we will review, follow-up and re-engagement. Some of the points that we are suggesting, and it is completely up to you, but what typically works well is scheduling regular check-ins, potentially touching base on first week, 30 days, 90 days to show continued support.

YM: We also want to focus on some shared updates. Shared updates and celebration of successes. Acknowledge the employer's role in client success story to truly reinforce the value of the partnerships. We also want to encourage you to gather feedback to improve future placements. Use employer input to refine candidates' preparation and match quality. Please don't hesitate to ask those questions on how we can improve our processes. Next, presenting new candidate opportunities. Please keep in mind that pipeline does need to stay open by proactively suggesting qualified candidates when roles become available. It is an ongoing communication and collaboration with an employer.

After the initial CDL placement was in our case study, employment specialist stayed in regular contact with the employer, celebrating 100% pass rate and checking in on new hires that were placed. This ongoing engagement truly led to employer to request additional candidates, turning that one-time placement into a sustainable hiring relationship.

4. Overcoming Challenges and Sustaining Employer Partnerships

YM: We'd love to move us to the fourth learning objective of our training. Now that we have covered job development process, our next step is to look at what it takes to keep those partnerships strong over time. We want to focus on sustainability and overcoming those challenges.

YM: I invite you once again to participate in answering this question. What challenges might job development staff encounter when managing employer partnerships? What are the challenges that your team is seeing? High turnover in HR or recruiters. Absolutely. Loss of the right contact. Very valid. Lack of clients to place currently. Okay. Loss of contact. Lack of jobs. Feedback. Company turnover. Experiencing low pay. Speaking to the right person. Lack of transparency. Not understanding their recruitment. Keeping everyone informed. Being rejected. Keeping English. Loss of contacts seem to be very true. Turnover. Absolutely. Absolutely.

Thank you so much, folks, for actively participating in this brainstorming session. Let's go ahead and dive into some of those common challenges and talk a little bit more about them. Even with strong partnerships, challenges can arise that truly test the strength of that partnership. Recognizing a lot of the ones that you mentioned—I would love to highlight some of the most consistent ones that we see across the board. We see employer hesitancy or misconceptions. There's concern. A lot of you identified about language barriers, concern about productivity, additional training needs can slow hiring decisions.

We also, across the board, see early turnover or retention issues often linked to mismatched expectations, limited onboarding support, communication gaps. One thing that I also wanted to highlight, that a lot of you that are dealing with job development do have very large caseloads, which ultimately limits [your] ability to provide immediate responses or proactive follow-up with every employer that you have. A lot of you mentioned loss of contacts. There's turnover on their side, but there's also limited capacity on our side, and it's definitely worth recognizing.

YM: Another aspect that a lot of you mentioned, and we are seeing across the board is our clients have incredibly complex needs. Some of them might require accommodation. Some might need extra training time. A lot of them might need support to even navigate the workplace environment. There's a lot of concerns about workplace culture, et cetera. I also want to note that a lot of you are dealing with job seekers, complex life situations. Just to add to that, there's child care concerns that are very typical. There's transportation concerns. A lot of our clients have housing challenges, and that may create attendance issues.

It can also be misinterpreted as unreliability, which makes things harder. Identifying these common challenges truly allows us to prepare solutions in advance, manage employer expectations, and ensure that both clients and employers have the support that they need for long-term success. I would love to share some of the strategies that can help us strengthen relationship and improve outcomes for both employers and clients. First, we want to dive into co-developing onboarding and training solutions. A lot of our offices have been very successful with co-developing those materials.

For example, working with employers and training providers to adapt processes so they can better serve our clients. They could be training materials. It just could be shifting the processes themselves a little bit. Maintain regular and structured communication. Establish a standing meeting that works for both employers and training partners to catch issues early, so we are aware of that. Use employer and

client feedback to improve matches. Now, we want to review performance and placement feedback together to make those continuous improvements.

YM: We also, again, want to highlight, we do want to celebrate those small wins to build that trust. Highlight when adjustment leads to successful enrollment, maybe completions, maybe retention. We definitely want to celebrate those. Setting realistic expectations early. Clear timelines, readiness, identifying what supports are available from the start. One of the examples that come to mind for successful use of these strategies... In Northern California, where many immigrants hold medical degrees but face barriers to re-enter their professions, one CBO partnered with a CNA employer and a training partner that traditionally relied on standardized entrance tests to be accepted into the program.

Now, these tests require advanced English reading and test-taking skills that did not really reflect the actual duties of a certified nursing assistant. As a result, many of our highly qualified multilingual candidates that have medical experience, they were excluded from even applying into the programs. Now, through continuous advocacy to an employer in NorCal, the CBO career development team emphasized that CNA roles, they demand more practical skills and compassion more than standardized test performance. I know that this is something we also see quite often.

In response, that partner replaced that standardized test with in-depth interview process and added visual aids. They also offered some targeted support. This change not only expanded access for immigrant candidates, but also created [an] increase in enrollment, improved completion rates, and created a steady flow of qualified hires to that employer. Please do not hesitate to advocate to your employers, communicate with them what worked well in your programs, what might have worked well with previous employers that you have.

YM: I want to emphasize that when we work alongside employers and training partners to adapt those systems, we remove barriers that hold candidates back, turning a hiring challenge into a sustainable success story. Now we can move to completion of our case study for Ahmad. Now, the CBO partnership with Easy Truck Rental yielded successful results, and Ahmad obtained his Commercial Driver License. Additionally, the qualified talent pool expanded as CDL pass rate rose from 20% to 100%, ensuring employers had access to skilled and licensed drivers.

Next, graduates also transitioned directly into the workforce, filling critical transportation roles. Easy Truck Rental also expanded, launching two transportation companies that now hire their own graduates, creating a sustainable workforce pipeline. This partnership truly transformed outcomes for our clients by adapting instruction, providing culturally responsive support, like all of you mentioned, partnering with a provider who is also an employer and a refugee themselves. Our clients achieved 100% pass rates, secured immediate jobs, and built a strong term employment pipeline for the community.

This is definitely a very inspiring story. I would love to just take a look at the lessons that we can learn from Sacramento on ideal partnerships. It truly illustrates how targeted and collaborative approaches can turn persistent workforce barriers into sustainable hiring pipelines. The success came from working with an employer who

not only understood the unique challenges of LEP workers, but also was willing to adapt training and hiring processes to meet those needs.

YM: Some of the takeaways, culturally aware and adaptable employers do bring an understanding of both operational needs and the realities faced by newcomers. Do search for those. Dual role partnerships like Easy Truck Rental—they remove the common gap between training completion and actual employment by offering both certification and job offer. This is very common for transportation, health care, engineering, and manufacturing industries. Tailored training methods such as multilingual instruction, culturally inclusive classrooms, peer learning, ongoing coaching enable job seekers to succeed faster and with greater confidence.

Last but not least, employer-focused outcomes, including a ready talent pool, immediate hires, and strong retentions are very critical to building trust and keeping employers engaged. [The] Sacramento model definitely shows that when CBO and employers work together with intention, the result can extend far beyond one hiring cycle. It builds a pathway where job seekers are set up for long-term success and employers gain reliable, motivated workforce that truly, truly strengthens the community.

These simple engagement practices that we can put in action and stay connected with your employers, some of the most practical ways to do so, just a reminder for the group, we encourage you to create a reminder for monthly follow-ups. It could be a quick call, it could be an email, maybe a visit just to keep the lines [of] communication open. We do encourage you to invite your employers to advocacy and volunteer events. Offer a way for them to connect with your mission and community outside of hiring. Invite them to your office. Give them a tour. Talk to them about your mission.

YM: Form an employer advisory council and extend invitations. Give your employers voice in shaping your services while deepening the investment into your work. Ask to connect with their professional colleagues. Maybe expand your employer network through those trusted referrals. We also encourage you to share your social media, your newsletters, your success stories. Reinforce your impact and show them the value that the partnership plays.

Then, moving into some of the last points of today's presentation, we cannot ignore a feedback loop. [A] feedback loop is something that in workforce partnerships always means creating intentional opportunities to check in. That is ultimately an ideal feedback loop. We share updates, we make adjustments, so the placements are more successful over time. Now, a strong feedback loop reinsures that employer relationships stay productive and problems are addressed very quickly. It is about creating intentional opportunities for two-way communication, not just reaching when issues arise.

Again, we encourage you to schedule consistent check-ins, maybe setting 30, 60, 90 days follow-ups that shows consistent commitment and prevents small issues from becoming large problems. We encourage you to create clear channels for feedback, whether it is email, surveys, schedule calls. Just try to make it as easy as possible for both employers and clients to share their experience. Share positive results. Of

course, don't hesitate to share some of the achievements and adjust preparation and onboarding as needed.

YM: We encourage you to use that feedback to fine-tune your preparation of candidates, whether it's your job readiness training, maybe adjusting your training content, maybe providing additional workplace accommodation. Anything that goes into adjustment. When that feedback is gathered consistently and acted upon, it truly strengthens trust, improves placement outcomes, and keeps both employers and clients engaged in partnership.

Our final slide for this presentation, in conclusion, it truly is important to note that strong employer partnerships, they don't end when a candidate is hired. Maintaining that relationship over time truly ensures that employer sees you as a trusted partner in the community, not just a job placement service. Some of the main points that we encourage you to do: follow up when not actively placing clients. Check in periodically. Even if there's no current pipeline, it is good to keep the conversation warm and learn about some of the upcoming hiring needs.

We encourage you to offer value through resources and labor market insights to keep that relationship going. You want to share articles, data, some trends that are relevant to employer industry, and you also want to recognize and appreciate employer contribution. We encourage you to thank them publicly or privately, highlight their impact in newsletter, potentially some of your social media, and truly acknowledge their role in your client's success. Long-term relationships are built on consistent engagement, mutual benefit, and trust. The more value you bring beyond those placements, the more employers will see you as a true indispensable partner in the community.

5. Q&A

YM: Thank you so much, everyone. I would love to move us to our Q&A portion. You are more than welcome to post your questions in the Q&A chat. I also thank everyone for submitting some of the questions earlier, before the training. I will go ahead and start with those. We grouped some of those questions based on common themes. One of the questions that I would like to start [with], "Which companies are open to hiring LEP job seekers? How do we find refugee-friendly employers?" This is a wonderful question.

Truly, there is no universal list, but many employers in industries with labor shortages, such as hospitality, food processing, health care support, logistics, warehousing, construction, they have proven to be open to hiring LEP workers. We encourage you to start with those industries. Now, we can also, as CBOs, can identify refugee-friendly employers through our network. Word of mouth and referral from our clients, of course, employee advisory councils, or we always encourage you to strengthen your partnership with local workforce development board and work closely with them.

We also wanted to highlight some resources, like Tent Partnership for Refugees. A lot of you might already be working with them, but please don't hesitate to check them out. There are definitely many opportunities there. Another question is, "Where

can we find data on LEP populations and resources for supporting them?" Now, would love to share just few resources that you might already be aware of, but nevertheless, Migration Policy Institute and American Immigration Council, they typically polish very detailed LEP data by state and industry.

YM: It's worth mentioning U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey that tracks English proficiency by region. I also want to highlight, of course, Switchboard's resource library. We provide tons of guides, case studies, and tools for supporting LEP population. Please don't hesitate to connect with us, and of course, state-level reports. Please do not hesitate to tap into some labor departments and workforce boards. They often highlight those regional language access needs that we can leverage.

I think we have few more questions. Youth and special populations. What resources exist for newcomer youth and migrant transitional-age youth with limited English? I do want to highlight that many workforces and CBOs already tailor support for newcomer youth. For example, contextualized ESL tied to high school completion or GED preparation. There are some bridge programs that link to community colleges. Also, a lot of transitional-age youth qualify for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA, youth programs that provide job readiness training, paid work experiences, and, of course, we as CBOs play a very critical role in providing mentorship and after school tutoring as well as some wraparound services to our youth population.

YM: There is also one question that came in. What advice can be given for navigating employment for refugees in this era of more open hostility towards immigrants? This is a very important question, [a] very challenging question that I might not be able to fully answer in this space. What I can share is this: hostility can show up both at systemic levels and in workplaces. One way we navigate this [is] by focusing on [the] business case for our employers—again, showing how hiring LEP job seekers improves retention, fills critical labor gaps, and strengthens workplace culture.

For clients—and I know many of you already do that—but we can provide education on workplace rights, role play for difficult scenarios, and connect them with supportive networks. Perhaps, most importantly, we can try to partner with employers who already see the benefits of hiring immigrants so they can become champions for others. Let me just take a look.

[pause]

YM: There is one question on how can we help refugees who moved to other states so they can still get support either in the resettlement field or career field? We always suggest warm referrals, connecting whether you are within the same system. If it's, let's say, IRC offices, please don't hesitate to connect your client with colleagues in the state that they are moving, connecting clients with whatever resettlement agencies are in the area, facilitating that warm connection is very important.

[pause]

YM: It feels like [a] majority of questions were already answered during the presentation. Thank you so much, folks, for active participation here. I would love to wrap up. Beautiful, and just go into our learning objectives. Hopefully, today, we were able to describe critical role of strategic employer partnership. Identified mutual benefits for both employers and LEP newcomers. We also were able to apply best practice job development strategies and recognize and implement strategies to overcome those common challenges.

Please help us help you. We encourage you to scan this QR code and click on the link. Sorry. Scan the QR code or click on the link. This survey is extremely important to help us improve future trainings. It's only 60 seconds and 5 questions. I encourage you to just take a little time to help us improve moving forward. Just take a minute.

[pause]

YM: Thank you so much, folks. We really appreciate your feedback. Moving to recommended resources, we posted links here. You will also receive the slide deck along with the recording of this webinar, so you can easily access these resources. There are some great, great suggestions from the webinars. There are some guides, videos, and tools that can be very helpful for you. For more training and technical assistance, please do stay connected with Switchboard. We encourage you to email us at switchboard@rescue.org.

Please visit us at SwitchboardTA.org or follow us on social media. We also encourage you to scan the QR code that will take you directly to our page. On behalf of all of us at Switchboard, I thank you for learning with us, and we truly hope to see you again very soon. Thank you so much, everyone, and enjoy the rest of your week.

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