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5 Tips for Building Employer Partnerships to Connect Newcomers to Employment

Many employers face ongoing workforce shortages, while newcomer job seekers often struggle to access opportunities that align with their skills and experience. Strong **employer partnerships** help bridge this gap in a mutually beneficial way—they help organizations connect newcomers to jobs while helping employers access qualified candidates, address workforce needs, and improve hiring and retention. Use the following five tips to take a strategic, relationship-based approach to employer engagement and newcomer job placement. For more, view Switchboard's archived webinar Building Employer Partnerships to Support Low-English Proficiency (LEP) Job Seekers.

1. Do your research.

Strong employer engagement practices start before your first email or phone call. Begin by understanding the job market in your area:

- **Research** your local labor market to identify in-demand industries, occupations, and local employers that may be a good fit for the job seekers you serve.
- **Learn** about local employers' available positions, hiring requirements, locations, schedules, and other important job characteristics.
- **Understand** participants' skills and strengths, interests, and employment history so you can identify appropriate employment opportunities.
- **Identify** potential barriers your clients might face to getting and keeping a job.
- **Connect** with Workforce Development Boards, American Job Centers, Chambers of Commerce, and other community partners that may already have employer relationships.

2. Demonstrate the value of partnership to employers.

Employer outreach is the beginning of a two-way partnership. Instead of asking an employer to hire your clients, use what you learned through your research to guide the conversation.

- **Ask questions** about difficult-to-fill positions, hiring needs, turnover, and the qualities the employer looks for in successful employees.
- **Tailor** your outreach and pitch based on your initial research and what you learn through conversation with the employer. Switchboard has templates and scripts that can help.
- **Clearly explain** the support your organization can provide to the employer, and illustrate how your clients can help address the employer's needs.
- **Be prepared to reassure employers** that the clients you refer are legally authorized to work in the U.S. and respond to questions they may have about employment documentation and the hiring process. See this Switchboard blog for more information.
- **Lead** with the participants' skills, experience, and strengths—not the barriers they may face.

3. Offer multiple forms of engagement.

Not every employer relationship begins with a job opening. Give employers ways to interact with your organization and clients to build familiarity and trust, creating a foundation for future hiring.

- **Invite** employers to participate in mock interviews or speak about their industry and career opportunities.
- **Organize** workplace tours that expose participants to different jobs and work environments while giving employers an opportunity to meet potential candidates, learn more about refugee and newcomer populations, and build rapport before the formal interview process.
- **Engage** employers in job readiness or industry-specific training by inviting them to lead a session, share training materials, or provide input on the skills and workplace expectations participants should prepare for.
- **Explore** job fairs, internships, on-the-job training, mentorship, and other opportunities that bring employers and job seekers together.

4. Focus on the right match.

A successful placement should work for both the participant and the employer. Thoughtful matching increases the likelihood that participants succeed and helps establish your organization as a trusted source of qualified candidates.

- **Confirm** that participants understand the job duties, wage, schedule, location, transportation requirements, and workplace expectations.
- **Match** opportunities with participants' skills, strengths, interests, and employment goals.
- **Refer candidates** who are both qualified and genuinely interested in the position.
- **Prepare participants** for the specific employer and role, not just general interview practice.
- **Establish a clear referral process,** document key procedures and contacts, and build relationships with more than one employer contact whenever possible to maintain continuity through staff transitions.

5. Follow up to sustain employer partnerships.

A placement should not be the end of employer engagement. Consistent follow-up helps identify challenges early, improves future referrals, and can turn one successful placement into a long-term employer partnership. To build partnerships that last:

- **Ask** employers for feedback after interviews, even when the candidate is not selected.
- **Check in** with both the employer and participant after a placement.
- **Use employer feedback** to improve participant preparation and future candidate matching.
- **Stay connected** when an employer is not actively hiring.
- **Look for opportunities** to deepen the relationship over time rather than reaching out only when you need a placement.

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