

# Effective Job Development Strategies for Working with the Hardest to Employ

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Assistance Series

Researched and written by Sarah  
Fishbein and Chris Warland of the  
National Transitional Jobs Network

[www.transitionaljobs.net](http://www.transitionaljobs.net)

[ntjn@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:ntjn@heartlandalliance.org)

**Effective job development**—creating opportunity for subsidized employees to move into the unsubsidized labor market—is integral to the goals and successful outcomes of the Transitional Jobs (TJ) strategy. It is also one of the most challenging aspects of TJ program delivery, especially during times of high unemployment. Available research and program evaluation findings, combined with input from experts in the field, offer promising strategies to improve the success of job development efforts. The job development component is largely “demand driven”—focused on the needs and expectations of employers in the competitive labor market, yet success in placing participants in unsubsidized jobs is equally dependent on effective job readiness training, job search preparation and [retention support](#). For best practices in these and other elements of the TJ strategy, see the NTJN’s other [program resources](#).

## Key #1 Program Planning and Implementation

*Many of the most important factors in successful job development are best considered during the planning and implementation phases of TJ programming. It is essential that from the beginning of the planning process adequate program resources, staff time and administrative attention be dedicated to designing and putting into practice a comprehensive job development component.*

### **Provide Adequate Resources and Support for Job Development**

It is often a challenge to allocate enough resources and staff time to each of the critically important [core elements](#) of the Transitional Jobs strategy, but it is absolutely necessary that adequate resources are dedicated for job development staff to effectively cultivate employers. This means planning and budgeting for having job development professionals on staff and establishing a manageable caseload size. Evidence suggests that caseload size is directly correlated with a program’s employment impacts.<sup>1</sup>

### **Hire the Right Employees for the Job**

Successful job developers have strong skills in sales and networking, as well as industry knowledge. When possible, hiring job developers who have previous experience recruiting employers and who can bring relationships with them can strengthen the success of job development.<sup>2</sup> Agencies can further support job developers’ role through providing professional development opportunities such as trainings, conferences or workshops.

## Use Labor-market Information to Target Sectors that Hire Entry-level Workers that Fit Your Populations Served

It is important to know what industry sectors are hiring entry-level workers in your area in order to know what businesses to engage and to best prepare your participants to apply for those positions. The Bureau of Labor Statistics offers valuable information on employment projections and job openings at [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov). Local or regional economic development authorities also often have useful area-specific data on labor market demand for particular industries and occupations. Another great resource is O\*Net Online, a large comprehensive database of job descriptions and the skills, knowledge and training necessary for each occupation: [online.onetcenter.org](http://online.onetcenter.org).

## Use Employer Recognized Assessment Tools to Measure and Document Work-Readiness

While assessment tools are typically used to gain an initial sense of TJ participants' strengths, goals and challenges, they can also be used throughout the subsidized work process to help participants build soft skills and as a demonstration to potential employers of participants' readiness to enter unsubsidized employment. These ongoing assessments can measure and document work-readiness factors such as punctuality, personal presentation, and cooperation with coworkers and supervisors. Assessments of interests and skills can also provide job development staff with information to help them match participants with positions of interest, a practice that supports sustained employee motivation.<sup>3</sup>

### Example: Hiring the Right Employees for the Job Development Role

Heartland Human Care Services is a Chicago-based nonprofit that provides Transitional Jobs to a range of target populations including people with criminal records, people with low-literacy and public housing residents. The professionals responsible for job development and employer outreach at HHCS are known as "Business Services Representatives," and are recruited and hired based on strong sales experience and industry sector knowledge.

## Key #2 Employer Engagement

*Successful job development is entirely dependent on your ability to identify, engage and persuade the employers that are most likely to hire candidates from your program. Promising and evidence-based strategies for engaging employers and getting them to hire your candidates include:*

### Take a "Dual-Customer" Approach

Significant attention should be given to cultivating employer relationships with an understanding of the needs of potential employers. Developing an in-depth understanding of an employer's needs, values, and available positions through asking questions, listening carefully and then demonstrating understanding by matching the employer with employees whose goals, interests and aptitudes are a good match with employer needs is critical for building relationships with employers. Attending to both employer and employee needs supports the creation of long-term employer partnerships as well as placements that serve the needs of both parties.<sup>4</sup>

### Target the Right Employers

Small and medium-sized employers and locally-owned companies may find more value and benefit from the additional supports and financial incentives provided by hiring TJ participants. They may also have fewer hiring restrictions and less bureaucracy, and be more likely to recognize and value the community benefit and social purpose of hiring TJ participants.

## Effectively Engage and Network to Develop Long-Term Employer Relationships

Networking with current and potential employers, as well as partnership businesses, allows job developers to create long-term employer partners.<sup>5,6</sup> Effective networking and engagement strategies include:

- Join and participate in organizations that allow access and interaction with local employers such as, local Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, or trade associations.
- Attend local job fairs to explain to employers what you can provide to them with regard to candidates and services and liberally distribute business cards, brochures and fliers that detail job developer name and contact information, services provided, as well as other business references who have used job developer's services in employing TJ participants.
- Research potential employers ahead of time, including job descriptions and postings, to learn what skills are important for their employees to have. This will allow you to approach employers with a prepared plan for contact.<sup>7</sup>
- Become comfortable making the 'business case' to employers (see 'Make the Business Case' for TJ to Employers below).
- Educate potential employers about realistic challenges and benefits of hiring TJ participants.
- Use constructive language when explaining services, such as describing employees who experienced "challenges" instead of "barriers." "We'll be in touch with you regularly to see how you're doing," may resound with potential employers rather than social service language, "We provide follow up services".<sup>8</sup>
- Keep track of when to follow-up with employers and the next steps.<sup>9</sup>

## Make the "Business Case" for TJ to Employers

There are inherent advantages for employers who hire an employee from a TJ program, but employers may need to be informed of these advantages.

- Recent work experience: TJ participants have a recent, proven track record of success in the workplace, gained through their transitional employment. TJ providers serve as a reliable recent employer reference for potential unsubsidized employers.
- Tax incentives: Employers are eligible for payroll tax credits as well as business credits for newly hired individuals under the extended [Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#) as well as under the [Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment \(HIRE\) Act of 2010](#). Under the HIRE act, employers may qualify for a 6.2% payroll tax incentive and may claim a business credit on individual employees up to \$1000 when filing 2011 income tax returns.<sup>10</sup>
- Human resources services: Many TJ programs effectively provide free human resources services for employers. Examples include providing background checks, drug tests and employee records that could otherwise be costly or time-consuming for employers to obtain. Programs can explicitly offer HR services to potential employers and then follow through by demonstrating their continued willingness to communicate with both employer and employee to provide support and work through problems if they should arise.<sup>11</sup>
- Federal Bonding: The Federal Bonding Program offers fidelity bonding for "at-risk" employees, including people with criminal records, at no cost to the employer. Fidelity bonding protects employers against theft, forgery, larceny, and embezzlement. For more information see [www.bonds4jobs.com](http://www.bonds4jobs.com).
- Soft-skills training: Entry-level employers express a need for and value of employees with soft skills, and TJ programs provide participants with soft skills job readiness training.<sup>12</sup> Employers can then benefit from hiring an employee from a TJ program who has recently completed job-readiness that includes the desired soft skills—showing up consistently and on time, cooperating with coworkers and supervisors, demonstrating a positive attitude, etc.<sup>13</sup>

- Sector-based hard-skills training: Hard skills training is also a valuable component of some TJ programs which offer sector-specific work experience and training that can be valuable to employers in that sector or related sectors. “Green jobs” is a job growth sector that many TJ programs have trained participants specially for, thus making them an asset to a potential green jobs employer.
- Ongoing retention services: TJ programs that offer evidence-based retention services provide potential employers with an opportunity to decrease turn-over costs because they positively affect long-term employment retention. With an average national turnover rate 2009 of around 16%, employee turnover—especially among entry-level workers--represents substantial costs to employers.<sup>14</sup> Candidates that receive six months or more of retention support, at no cost to the employer, may be more attractive than other entry-level candidates with no access to such services.

### **Key #3 Continually Evaluate Job Development Success**

*Establishing a network of employers partially depends on a job developer’s ability to demonstrate effective employer to employee matching – which is ultimately a reciprocal benefit to employers and participants. One indicator of this, used by certain programs, is a comparison between the number of TJ participants interviewed by an employer and the number of those people who actually are hired by the employer.<sup>15</sup> Another indicator with which to evaluate job development success is the occurrence of repeat business contact with employers.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of the indicators used to track and evaluate these efforts, it is important that programs consistently use the same indicators to track and evaluate job development efforts overtime to measure success and make program and staff improvements.*

**To get more information, request technical assistance, or share your successful strategies for job development, please contact Chris Warland at [cwarland@heartlandalliance.org](mailto:cwarland@heartlandalliance.org).**

#### **Endnotes**

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**The National Transitional Jobs Network is (NTJN) is a coalition of city, state, and federal policy makers; community workforce organizations; anti-poverty nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations committed to advancing and strengthening Transitional Jobs programs around the country so that people with barriers to employment can gain success in the workplace and improve their economic lives and the economic conditions of their communities. The NTJN supports a constituency of over 4,000 active members and stakeholders across the country.**

**The NTJN is a project of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights.**

