

**Business Development Initiative, Phase I:
Findings and Recommendations**

Productive Living Board

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes Phase I of the Business Development Initiative, conducted by Affirmative Solutions, LLC.

Phase I of the Business Development Initiative included the following core elements:

1. Data gathering and interviews to identify available resources, systems and provider readiness of participating agencies, other stakeholders and employers.
2. Recommendation for an “employment model(s)” that identifies the infrastructure procedures and support systems that is necessary to improve employment outcomes.

Affirmative Solutions, LLC conducted interviews with ten PLB funded agencies that provide employment services, six employers, six stakeholders and three funders. A steering committee consisting of local experts in employment and transition met to provide guidance and feedback for the project and to give input on best practices. Consistent themes arose throughout the data collection phase. These themes were apparent across all interview groups and were reiterated in steering committee meetings.

Common themes include:

1. Develop a concise and consistent business case for prospective employers.
2. Continue emphasis on staff training to include employer expectations and industry specialization.
3. Enhance job seeker training to better prepare them for work.
4. Identify model(s) to encourage and reward collaborations.

Based on the common themes, the following options for consideration are proposed:

1. Establish an appropriate business message and ensure delivery of this message is consistent.
2. Provide continued support to build agency staff capacity.
3. Consider a public/private partnership with a staffing firm for building long-term relationships with the business community.
4. Explore a model of industry specific expertise.
5. Explore partnerships.

Introduction

In May, 2011, the PLB hosted a meeting with Employment Providers to discuss the current employment system, barriers to employment and employers' perspectives and expectations. Eight agency representatives agreed to participate in workgroups to identify ways to increase and improve employment outcomes for St. Louis County citizens. The group identified four priorities:

- Staff Competencies
- Consumer Competencies
- Gaps in Services and Options to Fill the Gaps
- Identifying Employer Needs, Finding Contracts and Jobs

This report addresses Phase I of the Business Development Initiative; identifying employer needs, finding contracts and jobs. This Initiative was designed to facilitate and direct an approach to Business Development that will improve employment outcomes for job seekers in St. Louis County. For the purpose of this report, the term "job Seekers" refers to individuals with developmental disabilities who are seeking employment.

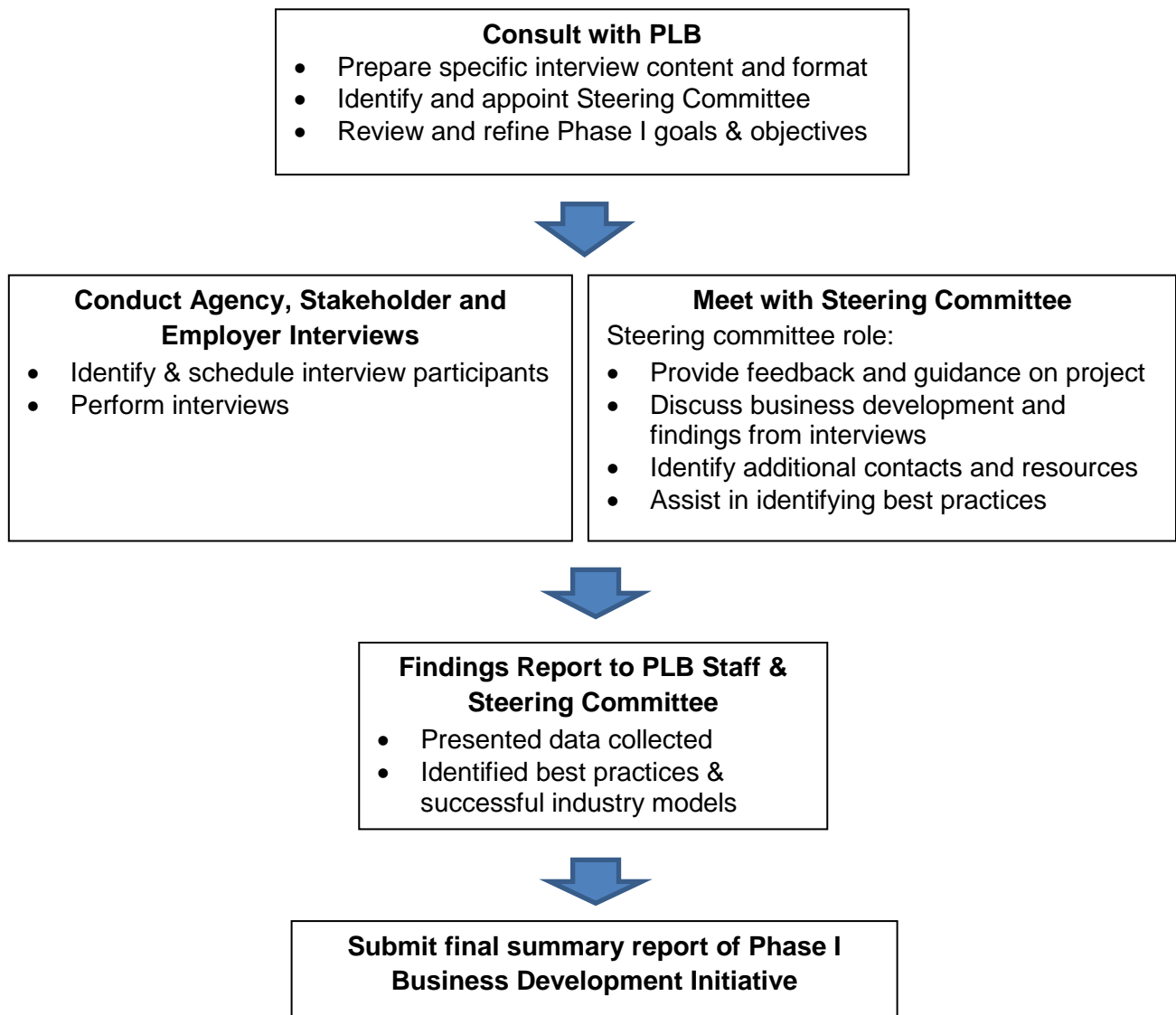
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1. Data gathering and interviews to identify available resources, systems and provider readiness of participating agencies, other stakeholders and employers.
2. Recommendation for an "employment model(s)" that identifies the infrastructure procedures and support systems that is necessary to improve employment outcomes.

This report contains details on the data collection process, a summary of findings and options to be considered for increasing employment opportunities for job seekers.

Process Overview

Exploration and data collection was performed through interviews, steering committee meetings and best practice research. Affirmative Solutions, LLC conducted interviews with ten PLB funded agencies that provide employment services, six employers, six stakeholders and three funders. Questions for these interviews focused on what is currently being done, what is working, what is not working and what can be done to increase and improve employment opportunities for job seekers. A steering committee consisting of local experts in employment and transition met to provide guidance and feedback for the project and to give input on best practices. In addition, Affirmative Solutions identified best practices and successful business models. The following flow chart outlines the procedure followed in Phase I.



Findings Summary

The interview process for Phase I was completed in October 2013 and resulted in a collection of responses and recommendations from the various agencies, employers, stakeholders and funders. A detailed list of interview questions and responses can be found in Appendix A and B, respectively. Following the completion of interviews, responses were presented at a steering committee meeting on October 30, 2013. Key points from the committee's discussion were considered when consolidating findings.

The following themes arose during the data collection process. Below each theme are supporting statements adapted from interviews and steering committee discussions.

1. Develop a concise and consistent business case for prospective employers.
 - Develop a common, agreed upon message
 - Emphasize employer value
 - Employers prefer a single point of contact
 - Encourage a dual customer model – employer and job seeker
 - Introduce a marketing campaign
2. Continue emphasis on staff training to include employer expectations and industry specialization.
 - Professionalism
 - Emphasis on job specific skills
 - Industry specific job coaches
 - Identify employer expectations
3. Enhance job seeker training to better prepare them for work.
 - Develop hard skills training specific to identified industries
 - Sheltered workshop training sites
 - Soft skill training
 - Resume/Interview preparation
 - Continue collaboration with SSD to provide training opportunities
 - Begin transition planning sooner
 - Utilize existing community job training services
4. Identify model(s) to encourage and reward collaborations.
 - Database for sharing job leads
 - Develop relationships with staffing companies in public/private partnership
 - Expand sheltered workshop roles (e.g. job training sites)
 - Focus on outcomes vs process
 - Explore incentives to encourage agency collaboration

In addition to the above themes, the stakeholder and funder groups identified issues that may impact current employment outcomes, including:

- 2008 recession changed everything
- The number of individuals that need transition services is increasing
- Agency support staff need industry specific training to successfully support both employers and job seekers
- Department of Labor (DOL) enforcement of Olmstead
- Efforts to eliminate substandard wages would increase workshop wages to minimum wage

Options for Consideration

The goal of Phase I was to gather data, conduct interviews and identify available resources, systems and provider readiness for implementation of the Business Development Initiative. As was outlined in the findings summary, common themes arose through this data collection process that help to guide future direction for this initiative. The second core element of Phase I of the Business Development Initiative sought recommendations for an employment model(s) that identifies the infrastructure procedures and support systems that are necessary to improve employment outcomes. Based on the data collected by Affirmative Solutions, LLC, the following recommendations were made with specific options for consideration:

1. Establish a clear business message and ensure delivery of this message is consistent.

It was often stated within interviews and steering committee discussions that employers are unaware of the benefits of hiring job seekers with developmental disabilities. It is important that a clear message is established to help employers learn of these benefits, and that this message is used consistently across the field. The use of a consistent, well established business message will cut down the confusion that may come from employers communicating with multiple representatives from different agencies.

- Develop clear and consistent business message for St. Louis County.
- Create a Business Development Specialist position to liaison with businesses on behalf of all agencies.
- Develop general employer/agency expectations and responsibilities.

2. Provide continued support for agency staff capacity.

A strong foundation has been set with the introduction of the Staff Competencies Training in collaboration with the Inclusion Coalition for Employment (ICE) and the Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) group with the University of Missouri. It is encouraged that the group continue these efforts to bring high quality, accessible training to all staff that support job seekers.

- Develop training modules from best practices on how to support individuals on the job.
- Develop industry specific training in areas with the greatest job potential.

3. Consider a public/private partnership with a staffing firm for building long-term relationships with the business community.

A best practice model that was identified (see Appendix C) showed the effectiveness of utilizing expertise from a private staffing firm. With a multitude of experience in connecting job seekers with employers, staffing firms may be better suited to sell the benefits of hiring job seekers. In addition, this collaborative approach would provide a single point of contact for both employers who are hiring and agencies supporting job seekers. Since the staffing firm is a private entity, it could reduce the competition among agencies that was cited during interviews.

- Identify staffing/recruitment firm to partner in identifying employment opportunities for job seekers.

4. **Explore a model of industry specific expertise.**

By training job coaches to have industry-specific expertise, they may be better able to support employees within their industry. Stakeholders and employers have identified that job coaches can make or break an employment situation. This is one way to better prepare these vital staff with the tools they need to help job seekers be successful.

- Identify 1 – 3 industries and employers with the greatest job potential.
- Provide industry specific training for agency staff and job seekers.

5. **Explore partnerships.**

It has become evident through the Phase I Needs and Opportunities Assessment that there is significant interest both within and outside the St. Louis Community to improve employment outcomes for job seekers. In order to maximize this momentum, the Productive Living Board might consider partnership with other leaders in the employment field in order to best serve St. Louis County job seekers.

- James Emmett, Two Steps Forward, Inc.
- Rob Hoffman, Employment Analytics
- Johndavid Kerr, J.D., Harris-Stowe University
- St. Louis County Economic Development
- MOBLN

Established job training programs in St. Louis may be able to provide training and support for job seekers without duplicating existing services. Further exploration of these services should be done to see how they might meet the needs of job seekers with developmental disabilities. The following programs are currently available to St. Louis county residents:

- Job Corps
- Missouri Division of Workforce Development – Career Centers
- St. Patrick Center
- Urban League
- St. Louis Community College

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Agency:

- Explain how your agency provides employment services to people with developmental disabilities.
- How do you prepare the consumer/job seeker to successfully compete for and secure a job in the marketplace?
- Describe and discuss collaborations with other agencies and/or stakeholders that contribute to your success or that must be improved.
- What are your suggestions to improve employment services in St. Louis County?

Employer:

- Does your company actively recruit job applicants with disabilities? Why or why not?
- What issues would concern you about hiring adults with disabilities?
- Would you consider hiring individuals from this demographic in the future?
- Does your company work with employment agencies representing adults with disabilities? Why or why not?
- What is your standard hiring process?
- Describe any additional thoughts on the subject of hiring employees with disabilities.

Stakeholder/Funder:

- What are the primary issues contributing to providing positive employment outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities in St. Louis County?
- What are your suggestions to improve employment services in St. Louis County?

Appendix B: Interview Responses

Agency Feedback:

- Community employment is not the primary service of most agencies.
- Focus on process as opposed to outcomes.
- Initial message to employers is inconsistent.
- Agency/job seeker focused; insufficient focus on employer value.
- Need to develop successful business relationships with prospective employers.
- Job coaches are the face of the agency and critical to successful employment outcomes, but lack training and business knowledge.
- Most job seekers are not adequately trained on: interview/resume preparation, job specific hard skills, soft skills.
- Agencies are competing with each other for funding/reimbursement.
- Concern about program making a financial contribution to the agency.
- Some agencies don't want to share consumer/job information while some agencies are seeking ways to fairly compensate each other for specific roles in employment process when collaborating.

Agency Recommendations:

- Establish interagency database of employer opportunities.
- Introduce a marketing campaign advising employers of opportunities.
- Present multiple candidates to employers and let them choose who they want.
- Recognize employers who are successfully employing job seekers.
- Improve overall standard of competence in agency employment personnel - TACE training is helpful, suggest Phase II that will focus on providing employer value.
- Redouble effort to emphasize outcomes as primary objective.
- Encourage industry specific hard skill job training.
- Develop and implement job seeker interview and soft skill training curriculum.
- Utilize sheltered workshops as training sites.
- Change mindset to two customer industry: job seeker & employer value.

Employer Feedback:

- Do not actively recruit from this demographic.
- Not confident job seeker can do the job/hard skill.
- High rate of turnover and perception of liability.
- Want single point contact.
- Job coaches need more training and understanding of their role.
- Job seekers not prepared for initial interview.
- Expect job seekers to fit in with no accommodations.

Employer Recommendations:

- Significantly improve the message and supply chain before introducing an employer marketing initiative.
- Focus on employer value.
- Offer on the job volunteer and/or internship opportunities prior to paid employment.
- Clearly define expectations.

Stakeholder and Funder Feedback:

- The focus is on near term curriculum as opposed to developing skill sets that prepare students for future employment opportunities (NCLB vs. IDEA).
- The population requiring transition services is growing exponentially.
- More professionals experienced in employment industry needed to address growth.
- Employment model must focus on outcome based results.
- Consider/promote employer driven engagement model (Kansas City).
- Evaluate impact of Section 503 revisions.
- Encourage peer coalitions with emphasis on specific action plan results (ICE).
- University driven educational inclusion programs promote higher level job skills and employment opportunities.
- The role of the sheltered workshop may change as 14c is eliminated as an employment model.
- Job seekers lack soft skill training & accountability for their own success.
- Job seekers are reluctant to obtain employment compensation at the expense of Medicaid and/or social security reimbursements.

Stakeholder and Funder Recommendations:

- Transition planning needs to begin earlier.
- Expand and implement job seeking employment initiatives in the school curriculum.
- More focus on dual customer approach to job development.
- Change funding models to encourage Agency collaboration (finders' fees, etc.).
- Consider employer reimbursement grants/benefits.
- Collaborate with sheltered workshops to identify and implement additional contribution to employment continuum.
- Consider best practices and other successful employment models (Walgreens, MANPOWER, Best Buy, Destination Desserts, SSM/SSD, Mercy model, etc.).

Steering Committee Recommendations:

- Provide a concise and convincing business case to prospective employers.
- Explore collaborations with staffing companies in a public/private partnership.
- Consider industry specific support agencies.
- Research and utilize existing community job training services. (Job Corps, Urban League, Community Colleges, etc.).
- Engage board members, senior staff and families in making referrals to potential employers.
- Consider sheltered workshops as potential training sites for industry specific jobs.

Appendix C: Best Practices

Best Practices:

Walgreen's Companies Supply Chain and Logistics Division

Walgreens set a goal of creating an integrated work environment “in which employees with and without disabilities would work side by side, doing the same jobs for the same pay, and being held to the same standards” (Kaletta, Binks & Robinson, 2012). This motion was put into action by a senior distribution executive who has an adult son with a disability. Within this model, Walgreens has built two new distribution centers with new technology to make all jobs accessible and adaptable for all employees.

The distribution centers partnered with area support agencies to set up adjoining training centers, where trainees can work for as long as they need with a job coach from a partner agency to learn a job that is available in the distribution center. In addition to specific job skills, trainees are taught soft skills and safety skills. When the trainee has learned the skills needed to perform the job and has passed a safety test that is required by all employees, they are hired into a position in the distribution center.

As of 2012, at their newest distribution center, 37% of employees had disclosed disabilities. Walgreens has set goals to increase the number of employees with disabilities at all of their 21 U.S. distribution centers. They are further encouraged to accomplish this goal due to the positive outcomes in their newest distribution center. An evaluation performed in 2012 showed that employees with and without disclosed disabilities performed at a statistically equal rate of productivity. In addition, employees with a disability had 48% less turnover than employees without a disability. The study also showed that safety rates among employees with disabilities were better than expected; with employees with disabilities having fewer workers' compensation incidents and less time away from work due to illness and injury than those without a disability, leading to money savings for the employer. (Kaletta, Binks & Robinson, 2012)

The Walgreens model has been consistently recognized as a best practice. They have been approached by numerous businesses to share ways to accomplish this success elsewhere. Walgreens gives regular tours to business leaders and openly shares their successes and challenges with others in hopes of helping other businesses to adopt inclusive practices.

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) public/private partnerships

Virginia Commonwealth University, in 2002, received funding to develop a model of public-private collaboration for placement of individuals with developmental disabilities into the workforce. The model was designed to create a strong business relationship among private staffing agencies, service organizations and job seekers with developmental disabilities with the primary objective to establish an effective referral process.

VCU performed two demonstration projects; one in an urban setting and one in a rural setting. Staffing agencies were assisted to develop a custom referral form that included information on the job seekers' skills, abilities, employment goals, disabilities and accommodations needed. Staff at the staffing agencies was trained on disability issues, job accommodations and the role of a job coach. The staffing agencies then worked through their business partnerships to find appropriate job placements for individual job seekers.

In the Urban demonstration, 33% of individuals who were referred to the staffing agency secured competitive employment in either full- or part-time work. In the rural demonstration, 27% obtained employment. VCU tracked the wages of these individuals as well as the months that they stayed employed. Both groups showed promising results for both outcomes. A study showed that individuals with disabilities served primarily by a service organization to find employment earned an average of \$7.03/hour while those who found work through the public/private partnership earned an average of \$8.64 per hour. The public/private partnership also obtained a higher percentage of competitive jobs with full time employment (Wehman et al., 2008).

Successful PLB Initiatives and Collaborations that could be Replicated/Expanded:

Hospital Model

Local hospitals and the Productive Living Board have collaborated with provider agencies to provide supported employment for over 70 people with developmental disabilities. Job coaches employed by provider agencies are trained on the hospitals' practices and procedures and are fully integrated into the hospital environment in order to best support employees in that setting.

Destination Desserts

Destination Desserts is a gourmet dessert company owned and operated by the Center for Specialized Services. This social enterprise provides multiple training and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Destination Deserts has shown anecdotal success and will soon be evaluated to determine the outcomes of this innovative, new model.

SSD Collaborative Training Program

This vocational skills employment training program at two area hospitals provides a one-year intensive training opportunity in an entry level position to students with disabilities. The program is collaboration between PLB, Special School District, DVR, two local hospitals and a provider agency. This pilot has successfully placed 71% of students who have participated.

Inclusion Coalition for Employment of Metropolitan St. Louis (ICE)

ICE is comprised of stakeholders in the St. Louis region who are committed to work together to improve outcomes for all supported employment service providers. ICE focuses on certain target areas, including staff competencies and training, consumer readiness, identification of jobs and employer needs and gaps in service delivery. This group has been meeting on a regular basis since 2011 and continues to address strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with job seeker/employer relationships.

Appendix D: Interview Participants

Agency Representatives:

Life Skills – Nicole Johnson, Vice President of Employment Services
Paraquad, Inc. – Angie Seigler, Director of Employment Services
Center for Specialized Services – Donna Gunning, Executive Director
Center for Specialized Services - Judy Grainger, Director of Quality and Program Development
Lafayette Industries – Rob Libera, Executive Director
Valley Industries – Jim Guyre, Executive Director
Heartland Industries – Dee Froneyberger, Executive Director
Canterbury Enterprises – Charley Fischer, Manager
St. Louis Arc – Mark Keeley, Vice President Support Services
St. Louis Arc - Brian Hubler, Director of Employment and Transition Services
UCP Heartland – Richard Forkosh, President and CEO
MERS/Missouri Goodwill Industries – Beth Brown, Assistant Vice-President

Employers:

Mercy Hospital – Dana Nichols, Manager, Supported Employment Services
St. Luke's Hospital – Candie Ingberg, Transition Coordinator Human Resources
St. Louis County – Kirk McCarley, Personnel Director
UMB Bank – Jacqueline Witte, Executive Vice President, Administration
Save-A-Lot Food Stores – Karen Sczepanski, Vice President Human Resources
Ben-Hur Construction – Randy Boettler, Vice President General Construction

Stakeholders:

University of Missouri, St. Louis - "SUCCEED" – Dr. Deborah Baldini, Associate Dean
Special School District – Casey Wisdom, Administrator; Marilyn Smith, EPS
MOBLN – Jay Mendell, Veterans Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation Programs Coordinator
Two Steps Forward, Inc. – James Emmett, Partner
Employment Analytics – Rob Hoffman, Owner, Senior Consultant
Inclusion Coalition for Employment (ICE) – Judy Grainger

Funders:

Vocational Rehabilitation – Barb Hoelzer, Director of Program Development
Department of Mental Health – Megan Fitzgerald Ingerman, Employment Resource/Youth Transition
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Fulvio Franzi, Director, Extended Employment Sheltered Workshops

Appendix E: Steering Committee Members

Barb Hoelzer, Director of Program Development
Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation

Megan Fitzgerald Ingerman, Employment Resource/Youth Transition
Department of Mental Health – St. Louis Regional Office

Frank Lenior, VP of Human Resources
Mercy Health Systems

Kathy Malarkey, Client Services Manager
Recruiting A Perfect Fit

Jay Mendell, Compensated Work Therapy/Vocational Rehabilitation
Programs Coordinator, Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor
VA St. Louis Health Care System

Casey Wisdom – Coordinator of Transition Services
Special School District

Joyce Prage, CPA, Executive Director
Productive Living Board

Kim Kopff, MA, Director of Program Services and Quality
Productive Living Board

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