

## HOW DO I MARKET MY WELFARE-TO-WORK PROGRAM TO EMPLOYERS?

**Answer:** Employer involvement is a key component of successful welfare-to-work programs. Relationships with the business community can facilitate job development and placement, ensure that preemployment activities meet labor market needs, and foster postemployment retention and advancement services.<sup>1</sup> Many program staff, however, have little experience

working with employers, and differences between the cultures of the public and nonprofit sectors and the culture of the private sector often make it difficult to form and maintain effective partnerships.

Marketing your welfare-to-work program is similar to marketing any product. You need to identify your target audience, assess its needs, and show how

your product can meet those needs. Two common mistakes are to approach employers without first understanding their interests and to describe your program to employers without making the connection to their needs. Your marketing will succeed only if you can show employers that your program can help them meet *their* workforce needs and improve *their* bottom line.

## BUILDING A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP WITH EMPLOYERS

Welfare-to-work and other employment programs that have established successful business partnerships emphasize the importance of developing long-term relationships with employers, rather than just seeking immediate job openings for program participants.<sup>2</sup> Businesses have contributed to these partnerships in a variety of ways, including:

- Conducting practice interviews with job-seekers
- Providing input into job readiness curricula
- Participating in graduation ceremonies and other events
- Donating equipment for training, prizes for participants, or food for events
- Reaching out to other employers

When businesses are true partners in a program, they feel that they have a stake in its success, they share their knowledge and experience, and they are willing to help solve problems that arise.

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## UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYERS' NEEDS

Marketing to employers begins with an understanding of the local labor market. General information about the labor market can be obtained from the media, universities, workforce development agencies, and local chambers of commerce. General information should be supplemented, however, by surveying employers — in particular, those with entry-level job openings — to learn about their specific needs. The following questions can be the basis for an effective survey:

- What are your current workforce needs? What workforce needs will you have in the coming year? In the next five years?
- What main challenges will your company face in the coming year? In the next five years?
- For which occupations do you hire entry-level workers?
- Are the entry-level jobs part time or full time, and what hours do employees work?
- What wages do you pay entry-level employees? What benefits do you provide for them?
- What education or special training do you require for entry-level positions?
- How much employee turnover do you experience in entry-level positions?
- What are typical reasons for employee turnover?
- What qualities and skills do you value in your workforce?
- What wage increases and promotion opportunities are available to entry-level workers?
- What additional skills and training are needed for job advancement?
- Who makes hiring decisions for your firm?
- How do you usually recruit workers? Are you open to considering new ways of recruiting?
- Have you made any efforts to recruit and hire welfare recipients? What has been your experience?

## DESIGNING A **MARKETING MESSAGE**

Once you understand employers' needs and concerns, carefully construct your program's marketing message to address them. The message should be no more than three or four sentences and should do the following things:

### **Promote your program's strengths.**

Show how your program's unique features can provide benefits beyond what employers can find elsewhere.

### **Sell outcome, not process.**

Focus on the benefits that your program offers to employers rather than describing the program in detail.

### **Provide testimonials.**

Relate how your program has helped other employers, by quoting their comments and citing examples.

### **Emphasize the bottom line.**

Illustrate the value to employers of your services, such as lower recruiting and training costs and reduced employee turnover.

### **Show how your program can solve a problem.**


Identify a specific problem that employers in your community are facing, and say how your program can solve it, for example, by providing job-ready workers or reducing employee turnover.


### **Be specific.**


Avoid general statements. Instead, mention the number of potential workers the program can refer, the names of companies that have used the program's services, and the average length of job retention for workers placed by the program.

## DELIVERING **THE MESSAGE**


Effective delivery of the marketing message is as important as the message itself. Consider the following suggestions.


 Use both verbal and written communications. People respond differently to various media, so repeat the message in various ways.


 Be professional. When meeting employers, dress in business attire, and offer them a business card. Record a professional-sounding message on your answering machine, and return all calls promptly.

 Encourage employers who have used the program to market it for you. Other employers are much more

likely to respond to a message from their peers.

 Invest in professional, well-produced communications. Enliven written materials with graphics and photos; use effective, well-prepared speakers for verbal communications.

 In both written and verbal communications, use clear and direct language. In particular, avoid bureaucratic jargon and "insider" terms.

 Always follow up your contacts. All communications should provide both the name and the number of a contact person at the program.

### NOTES

1. For more information on partnering with employers in welfare-to-work efforts, see Brown, Buck, and Skinner, 1998.
2. Programs with experience in business partnerships include the Center for Employment Training, the Greater Richmond Employment Assistance Team (GREAT), and Kansas City's Local Investment Commission (LINC). Some employers, such as Marriott International and United Parcel Service, operate their own welfare-to-work efforts in partnership with public and nonprofit agencies.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

#### Programs and Organizations

**Center for Employment Training:** 701 Vine Street, San Jose, CA 95110; (408) 287-7924

**Greater Richmond Employment Assistance Team (GREAT):** 4501 Williamsburg Road, Richmond, VA 23231; (804) 222-0400; greatprogram@erols.com

**Greg Newton Associates:** One Hanson Street, Boston, MA 02118; (617) 426-5533

**Jobs for the Future:** One Bowdoin Square, Boston, MA 02114; (617) 742-5995; www.jff.org

**Local Investment Commission (LINC):** 3100 Broadway, Suite 226, Kansas City, MO 64111; (816) 889-5050; www.kclinc.org

**Marriott International, Pathways to Independence:** Marriott Drive, Department 935.47, Washington, DC 20058; (301) 380-8583; www.marriott.com

**National Governors' Association, Center for Best Practices:** 444 North Capital Street, Suite 267, Washington, DC 20001; (202) 624-5300; www.nga.org

**Public/Private Ventures:** One Commerce Place, 2005 Market Street, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103; (215) 557-4400; www.ppv.org

**United Parcel Service:** 55 Glenlake Parkway, NE, Atlanta, GA 30328; (404) 828-4851; www.ups.com

**U.S. Chamber of Commerce:** 1615 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20062; (202) 463-5525; www.uschamber.org

**U.S. Department of Labor, Ideas that Work:** www.doleta.gov/ideasthatwork

**Welfare Information Network:** 1341 G Street, NW, Suite 820, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 628-5790; www.welfareinfo.org

### PUBLICATIONS

**Brown, Amy. 1997.** *Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

**Brown, Amy, Maria L. Buck, and Erik Skinner. 1998.** *Business Partnerships: How to Involve Employers in Welfare Reform.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

**Kramer, Fredrica. 1997.** "Employer Involvement in Welfare Reform." *Welfare Information Network Resources for Welfare Decisions*, Vol. 1, No. 4. Washington, DC: Welfare Information Network. www.welfareinfo.org/fdresourcere.htm

**Mills, Jack, and Richard Kazis. 1999.** *Business Participation in Welfare-to-Work: Lessons from the United States.* Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. www.jff.org/programs/cluster3/projects/busboard.htm

**U.S. Department of Labor, Technical Assistance and Training Corporation. 1999.** "Getting Employers Involved." *Ideas That Work*, Issue 8. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor. www.doleta.gov/ideasthatwork/issue8.htm

## QUESTIONS from the Field

The editors thank Greg Newton Associates for their suggestions about designing a marketing message.

"Questions from the Field" is a new series for practitioners in welfare-to-work and employment programs. MDRC welcomes suggestions or questions to be addressed.

The series is edited by Dina Berin and is a publication of ReWORKing Welfare, MDRC's technical assistance project. ReWORKing Welfare seeks to distill, synthesize, and share lessons from our research and experience in the field to help states and localities make informed decisions in this new environment.

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