Webinar: Establishing and Maintaining Employer Partnerships

May 9, 2024, 1:00 – 2:30 PM ET

Transcript

Introduction

Danica Kushner: Hello to everyone joining. So glad you're here. We'll be starting in just about two minutes as we let people join into the session.

[pause]

DK: Okay, so let's get started. Thank you for joining today's training on establishing and maintaining employer partnerships. This training is presented to you by Switchboard. Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the United States.

Zoom Orientation

DK: So here's a quick overview of your settings in Zoom. This is a Zoom webinar, so you're joining on listen-only mode. Due to the large number of learners on today's webinar, we've disabled the chat box. However, you do have the option to send messages to the speakers and co-facilitators via the Q&A. Keep an eye on the chat for messages from Switchboard and links to various resources we'll be mentioning throughout.

DK: Today's webinar will run for 90 minutes and is being recorded. You will receive an email with the recording, slides, and recommended resources within 24 hours. The webinar transcript along with the recording will also be posted on the Switchboard website within the following days. And last, we kindly ask that you would complete our webinar satisfaction survey at the conclusion of our session. This short, five-question survey helps us here at Switchboard continuously improve our training and technical assistance offerings to you all.

Today's Speaker

DK: So I'd like to introduce myself to you. My name is Danica Kushner, and I am a training officer for employment at Switchboard. As a training officer, I provide technical assistance for service providers related to career navigation, Match Grant, financial capabilities, and other economic empowerment-related topics. My background before joining Switchboard is nearly 10 years of direct services related to workforce development, employment placement, and career navigation with refugees in North Carolina and Colorado. Most relevant to this presentation today is my work developing several hundred employer partners and helping place hundreds of clients in jobs. I also worked internationally supporting refugee programs in Jordan and Lebanon, and I hold a master's degree in Migration from the University of Sussex.

Learning Objectives

DK: Okay. So today, I'd like to just dive into our learning objectives. We have four for you. So by the end of this session, you will be able to, first, describe the importance of employer partnerships in the context of job placement for ORR-eligible populations. Next, you'll be able to identify key considerations and benefits for employers and newcomer employees when establishing and maintaining partnerships. Third, you will be able to implement best practice job development approaches to effectively support newcomer clients in securing high-quality job placements. And lastly, you will be able to recognize common challenges in maintaining employer relationships and name strategies for overcoming them.

1. The Role of Employer Partnerships: Placing Newcomers in High-Quality Jobs

DK: So I'd like to start with talking about the role of employer partnerships in placing newcomers in high-quality jobs. We know that there are no high-quality jobs without high-quality employer partnerships, but we also know that each one of you in the room are in different places with building out your employer partnership network. With this, I'd like to get a good idea of who's in the room and what your employer partnership network is like, and so I have a Slido for you. If you can either scan the QR code or go to Slido.com and put in the code and answer this question:

Poll Question

How would you describe your current employer partnerships?

DK: Okay. Let me see. So far, largely, we rely heavily on a few employer partnerships for job placement. Okay. There's a few coming in, relying on employers but our relationships with them could be better. A few of you are saying, we have few, if any, quality employers. And a very small percentage right now says, we have a robust set of stable, engaged employer partnerships, so that's amazing.

DK: I'm so glad that there are a few here today who do have a robust set of stable, engaged employer partnerships. That is amazing, and I'm so glad the rest of you are here to talk a little bit further about how we can continue to grow our employer partnerships. Just give you... Okay. Alright, thank you for participating in that. Gives me a good idea, even though I can't see you all, who's here.

The Importance of Securing a Quality Job

DK: Alright, so let's talk a little bit about the importance of securing a quality job. I assume most of you on this call work in workforce development. Likely you work as an employment specialist like I did previously, or a job developer, and so you already know how critical employment is for a family unit's overall functioning. Some of you may also be here who are working in adjacent-type roles, and maybe employer networking is a small portion of your role, but I think we're all here because we recognize and realize how important high-quality jobs are from newcomers and want to further explore how to make sure that happens.

DK: So securing a high-quality job is vital for many different reasons, and not only for food and housing security. Securing a quality job is also vital for providing household essentials, for providing health insurance.

Most of us here know that we are reliant on our employment to give us quality health insurance and access to medical care.

DK: High-quality jobs also offer social connection, and social capital translates into better physical and economic outcomes. High-quality jobs can absolutely help with ESL, English language learning. In a natural way, people working on teams and with native English language speakers can be a huge benefit for them as they're learning this language.

DK: And high-quality jobs can offer dignity and purpose. Employment is a critical mental health intervention, and many of our clients are survivors of traumatic experiences, and having reliable employment can have a protective effect on their mental health.

DK: And the last one I want to mention, the importance of securing a quality job is because many of us are funded by ORR and need to keep compliance for self-sufficiency requirements—compliance with our ORR funding that requires self-sufficiency. We want to help people to get jobs as quickly as possible, and it's much easier for our clients to become self-sufficient if we have those employer partnerships in place.

Why Rely on Employer Partnerships?

DK: So why should we rely on employer partnerships? Our clients often face significant barriers to employment such as language barriers, mobility challenges, and a lack of previous relevant work experience. When we have quality employer partnerships, we are able to advocate for accommodations and improvements in quality jobs, which will lower the barriers to employment placement.

DK: Additionally, many of our clients leave behind robust professional and personal networks in their home countries, and these networks likely gave them access to employment opportunities. This network that I'm speaking of is vital for employment opportunities, not only for our newcomer populations but also for us. According to LinkedIn, four out of five people find jobs through their personal and professional network. I know that's been a significant part of my career journey is tapping into my professional and personal network to support my job search and finding different jobs between. So we help our clients expand that network so that they can more easily overcome employment barriers and more easily slot into jobs.

Phases of Employer Partnership Development

DK: So there are three phases that we want to highlight of employer partnership development. The first one starts with research and targeted outreach. This research and targeted outreach means understanding your labor market and indicators for where your labor market is at, spending time on job boards, talking with industry representatives, reading job descriptions, and spending time with your clients in order to learn their skills and the kinds of jobs that will work for them.

DK: Once you've done that research and targeted outreach, the next step is moving on to a strengths-based pitch. A strengths-based pitch means pitching your clients and the suite of employment services that your office can offer, maybe taking clients to interviews, assisting with filling out applications or whatever wraparound supportive services your office provides. You're also pitching yourself in these conversations as someone who's competent, professional, friendly, and someone that they would really enjoy working with.

DK: And then the third part of the employer partnership development comes out of that strengths-based pitch and we move into negotiations. So what this means is that you come to the table and you talk about the fact that you have this awesome talent, these services to offer, you are a huge benefit to the employer partner, and it's from that place of strength that you negotiate for the employer to then come to the table and offer things that your clients need, maybe high-quality jobs, a living wage, or various accommodations.

2. Key Considerations in Establishing Employer Partnerships

DK: Okay, so now we want to talk about key considerations in establishing employer partnerships. And I want to turn it back to you again for another Slido. You can scan the QR code or go to Slido.com and put in the code.

Discussion Questions

DK: I want you to start thinking about,

What are some difficulties employer partners face when hiring and onboarding newcomers?

DK: Okay, language barriers. That is huge, as we see it's coming up. Effective training across language barriers? Yes. Wow, this is across the board, a huge thing you all are seeing. Documents missing, transportation, cultural nuances. I think that's really good. There's so many cultural nuances that people experience in the workplace. Lack of U.S. experience. They don't understand the work authorization documents clients have. A limited long waitlist for ELL. Yes. These are great. Safety differences among cultures. Time management.

DK: Yeah, not accommodating prayer times in manufacturing warehouses. I definitely experienced a lot of challenges around accommodations needed for prayer, sometimes even having to do with the kind of work environment. Maybe there were issues related to not having the location or maybe... yeah, maybe they weren't able to make accommodations. Religious day accommodations.

DK: Hygiene issues, yes. I think the hygiene issues can sometimes go into those cultural nuances, where here in this country, we have some specific cultural norms of comfort levels related to hygiene that might be very different from another country, and so really trying to support people through that as we're placing them in jobs.

DK: Under-valuing or not valuing foreign degrees and experience is huge, that's a huge one. Yeah, great. See if just two more answers want to come in. Teamwork and team player issues, other employees not being accommodating or culturally sensitive. Yes. Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much for sharing these. I think these are really, really good. And obviously, we can see that a lot of us around the country are having some of the same issues, and so I'm excited to talk more about creating better employer networks to help support our clients to do these things.

DK: So now I want you to answer another Slido question, but I want you to think about the opposite here. We just explored the challenges or worries employer partners may have when working with you, but,

How can employers benefit from working with your organization to hire newcomer talent?

DK: Highly skilled workers, yes. You all are working with clients who are highly skilled, and employers would benefit greatly by hiring some of your clients. International experience. Increased retention. Motivated and eager employees. I love that. Diversity. Work ethic and commitment. Yeah, bilingual, so many different languages coming into their workforce. All are work-authorized. Increased diversity like was mentioned. Easement of the recruitment process. So like I mentioned, we can often offer wraparound services. A breath of fresh air for the organization. I like that one. Multilingual skills and committed people to the work, and our clients will be passing their background checks.

DK: Yeah, I think that was something that I remember as I was doing employment placement is sometimes companies really struggle to find people who had passed their background checks, and we could with confidence say that the majority of our clients could. No drug use or alcohol use on the job, yes. So bringing a really high-quality talent to them, and maybe though there are barriers in one way, there are also reduced barriers in other ways. Our clients are generally willing and eager to work, and they get to be part of the refugee resettlement process. I really like that. We'll talk a little bit more about that facet, but really inviting employers into the great work that we are doing, grassroot-level understanding of the immigrant community, and willing to do jobs that many people don't want to do.

DK: Great, these are amazing. Thank you so much for sharing these. I think it's really important to think about the ways that we are bringing this talent to the employers as we talk further about how to establish these employer partnerships.

Strengths Perspective

DK: So next, we're going to talk about the strengths perspective. The strengths perspective is a practice theory in social work, and it was developed by the University of Kansas. There's a quote on the screen that I'd like to read: "The strengths perspective is a corrective and transformative challenge to predominant practices and policies that reduce people and their potential to deficits, pathologies, problems, and dysfunctions. The strengths perspective emphasizes the human capacity for resilience, resistance, courage, thriving, and ingenuity, and it champions the rights of individuals and communities to form and achieve their own goals and aspirations."

DK: So as you see, the strengths perspective is a response to approaches in social work that spent a lot of time thinking about what people need, what are they lacking, how can we help them? And it kind of flipped it on its head, and it said, "Let's look at people's strengths, resilience, skills, and let's focus on those things rather than the deficits." So as we approach employer partners, we want to strive towards spending more time talking about the kinds of capacity our clients have for resilience and courage and the skills that they have, rather than thinking about their deficits.

Strengths-Based Approach to Employer Partnership Development

DK: So let's talk just a bit about what a strengths-based employer partnership approach does not look like. Many of us get into this work because we see a need that we can help fulfill. We look at our clients we serve, and we think, "Wow, oh my goodness, my heart goes out for them. They've endured so much." And we're helpers and we want to help them. And because we have that mindset, there's sometimes a tendency to approach our employer partners with this mindset, and it can lead to a conversation, something like, "Yeah, I'm wondering if you'd be willing to hire Maria. She has had such a hard life. She survived a terrible war. She has so many children. I'm really concerned for her. Her English isn't very good. Please, please, please hire her."

DK: So when you have a conversation like that, it's not that your heart is in the wrong place; however, the problem with that is really twofold. First the problem is that you just provided a list of barriers to the employer partner, and that might make them very, very nervous about hiring your client. Sometimes it's possible that that can work and that your employer partner has a set of social values that align with your organization, but it's really better to approach it with the strengths-based approach rather than pointing out all of Maria's deficits.

DK: The other problem with having a conversation like this with an employer partner is that you just set up a dynamic where you have said that the best thing that they can do is just hire your candidate, and that they're really doing your candidate a favor, because then they're just helping them. But nobody wants to be an employee and feel like the company they are working for is doing them a favor, because then the client will not have any leverage to advocate for themselves or progress in their career. So this is really not setting your client up for success. It's really putting them in kind of a power dynamic where they might not be able to have confidence and where they might feel like they're a little bit under the thumb of the employer.

DK: So rather than this example, it's important that we come to the table with a strengths-based approach, where we talk about all of Maria's skills, all of her resilience, and her striving. So it might be something like, "I have a candidate. Her name is Maria, and I think she would be an incredible addition to your workforce. She's eager to learn and has an incredible work ethic. She also speaks three different languages and may be able to support some of your other staff members." So this is a much better approach at highlighting her skills, her talents for language capacities, and possibly her global perspective.

DK: I also want to note that in a strength-based approach, we come to the table confident in providing a real financial benefit to the company. There are a lot of staffing agencies that require a lot of money to provide the kind of full-service or full-cycle recruiting or staffing services that you are willing to provide to them. So I think the really important thing to take away from this is that we come to the table with so much, and we ask our partners to come to the table with a lot as well.

Preparing for a Strengths-Based Pitch

DK: When it comes to having this conversation and preparing for a strength-based pitch, there are four dimensions that we should keep in mind. The first one I want to note is candidate qualities. We know that you might not be able to know everything about your candidates. You're probably working with really large caseloads. You may not have time to know everything about them, and it can feel really impossible, but we hope that you are able to know some key basics, maybe like location, what would work best for them, the salary, things like that. And we'll go a little more into detail about this facet of the strengths-based approach in a few minutes, for the clients that you are able to get to know.

DK: The next facet is candidate presentation, creating polished resumes and candidate profiles. The third one is job description research, reading and understanding job descriptions. And the last one is labor market research, know your areas unsupported by the labor market. So we're going to go a little bit more into detail of each four of these.

Candidate Qualities

DK: So candidate qualities. If you are able to get to know your candidates on a deeper basis, there are some knowledge areas that would be really good to know: factors that would make the job ideal for the candidate, maybe their location relevant to their home, the job title, the hours—many of our clients will need very specific hours so that they can also balance family needs—and benefits. Maybe there are specific health needs that they need to address through really good health insurance. And so knowing those really specific things about them so that you can find a job that is really fit for those needs. It would also be really good to know their employment history and their education history. What are the things that they bring to the table in that regard, and how can that potentially create more opportunity for them in a job?

DK: As you share with the employer, "This is my client's employment history. They used to work in a skill that really translates over to the work that you all are doing," it's also good to know their special skills, maybe the candidate's story of perseverance and resilience. And lastly, elements of the client's cross-cultural expertise. So maybe you have a client who has a lot of knowledge about diesel fuel, and you have an employer partner that is a bus company, and they think, "Wow, this would actually be really, really relevant experience to bring into our workplace and add to our workforce."

Candidate Presentation

DK: So now that you've ensured that you know the important skills, backgrounds, and needs of your client, it's time to package that into a strong and attractive way in your candidate presentation. I do want to note that not every candidate is going to require this level of professional profile, but as you initially work in an employer partnership relationship, it's really important that you put your best foot forward. First impressions really do matter. So there are a few different components of a professional profile that will make a strong candidate presentation. The first one is a professional resume. I would really encourage you, especially if it's a new employer partner, to make sure your clients have professional resumes. You can use a template—we do have one on our Switchboard website that can be really, really helpful for increasing efficiency—but also ensuring that you have that really strong candidate presentation.

DK: The professional summary is also a really great skill to acquire to become proficient in writing a few sentences about your client in the form of a professional summary. Sometimes this can also add to increased efficiency because maybe you are working with an employer partner, you can write a few sentences about your candidate and shoot it off in an email to the employer saying, "Here's a brief profile of one of my candidates. Would you like me to send over their resume?" This either buys you time to work on creating that resume for them, or if they say no, then it's also saved you time, because we know that your capacity can be really, really short.

DK: As part of all of this, it's really important that your candidates have professional email addresses. I think all of us know the importance for this in our own career journeys. We don't want to have those email addresses that we had when we were 13, 14 that don't really speak to our first and last name. I think that's a really important thing that can add a lot of value to your candidate presentation.

DK: And then LinkedIn: for mid- to late-level career opportunities, you want your candidates to be able to compete with other candidates that are at the same level, and LinkedIn is a powerful tool. So helping your clients set up a LinkedIn profile and maybe taking a headshot—it doesn't have to be professional, but it can look professional. So I know in this work, we wear a lot of hats. You may not have known as you entered this employment space that you would be responsible for taking photos of people on your iPhone, but this can add so much value, and your clients can make a greater impact on employers if they have this level of professionalism.

Job Description Research

DK: Alright, the next one is job description research. So you want to be able to educate yourself on what makes a strong candidate. This is a really important part that we want to talk about, and the way that you can do that is by learning about jobs. A strong knowledge base of the job available at the employer partner will help the employer partner feel like you are prepared to source candidates for that role because you understand what it is that they need.

DK: I know, personally, how overwhelming this can be. I've worked in a lot of different employment programs where I needed to learn about so many different kinds of jobs and jobs that I had never considered ever working myself, and that I really knew nothing about. Maybe you have a client that wants to do welding and you're like, "I don't even know any of the skills that they might need," so doing that job description research can help you significantly. And there's tools that can help you do that. So starting first by just reading through maybe five job descriptions, that will really help you start to identify what are some of the skills that they're looking for. You may want to read five different various welding jobs in your area. You'll start to see kind of a thread running through out of maybe the certificates for the skills that they're looking for in employees. And in research, you can find job descriptions on different boards such as Indeed, Glassdoor, or LinkedIn.

DK: I think another really helpful tool for job description research—and this is something that I relied on heavily because I like talking to people, I absorb information better when it's through a connection than just reading online—is maybe consulting with an industry mentor. So if you know people in various industries, you can call them up and just ask them what is it that they look for for these particular roles? Maybe you don't have the industry network in place, and so instead you can send out and ask the volunteer network at your organization who probably work in a variety of different sectors and may be able to either themselves answer some of these questions or connect you to somebody who can answer these questions.

DK: And then I think the last thing I want to point out is just being able to contact your professional association this is associated with particular sectors who know so much depth about the different industries you might be wanting to learn about. The folks there are usually really happy to help answer questions because this is their career backgrounds that they're experts in the different fields, and that can be a really, really great way to learn some of this crucial knowledge that you need in order to bring to the table a really good employer partner request.

Labor Market Research

DK: And the last one is labor market research; it's the fourth dimension of preparing for a strengths-based approach. So doing research will help you learn what jobs have a lot of opportunity in your service area, which jobs have talent gaps or are hurting for employees. By doing research and locating which jobs have high opportunity, you will then be able to pinpoint potential partners to connect with.

DK: In order to do this research, I would recommend a few different things. First, you can read your local Workforce Investment Opportunity Act or WIOA plan. If you're not familiar with this, it's a great tool that will tell you exactly what kinds of occupations in your area are expected to grow, or occupations that your state or local area think would be a great occupation for low-income working adults to move into and develop their careers, and skills and talents and education that they need to move into those workplaces. You can also do your research through your Bureau of Labor and Statistics.

DK: And as you do this, I think you'll start to recognize indicators of high-demand jobs. This might be sign-on bonuses if you see this in the research that you're doing, a company saying, "We'll give you $2,000 as you start," this will show that this is a high-demand job, there's a gap of talent. Maybe you see that they are regularly scheduling interviews. The presence of staffing agencies paid to source people for the specific industry because there's not enough talent—these are all indicators of high-demand jobs. And I think as you do the research and you start to learn about the different industries, you'll be able to pinpoint and recognize some of those indicators.

3. Best Practices in Job Development

What is Job Development?

DK: Okay, moving on to our third section. Let's talk a little bit about the best practices in job development. But first, what is job development? Job development is the practice of working with key employer partners to identify specific job opportunities that may be a good fit for job seekers. It's not that we create jobs that don't exist. It's that we find jobs that already exist, and then we work with our employer partners to make them really ideal opportunities for our clients.

Job Development Process

DK: So what does this process look like? There are four key steps that I want to talk about for the job development process. The job development process starts with initial outreach to a contact with decision-making power, so you'll notice here that you're wanting to contact someone with decision-making power. This is the specific language is something to take into consideration. Initially, when you're doing that initial outreach, you might think that it would be best to speak to an HR manager that would be the easily accessible person who has to do with hiring. However, speaking to a higher-level executive or manager who has decision-making power can be more beneficial for long-lasting partner relationships. Someone in this position might be able to make unilateral decisions or help direct HR staff to work closely and collaboratively with you. And maybe if things don't go well, because as we know, oftentimes things cannot go well, this person with decision-making power may be able to help improve or change workplace policy to better accommodate your clients. So really connecting with someone maybe who's higher up or who has a lot of sway in the company can be way more fruitful for this job development process.

DK: And I know that it can be really scary to speak to people higher up in the ranks. I had to get really comfortable doing this in my former roles, but I think this is intertwined in a strengths-based approach, really believing that you're capable of having these conversations and speaking to people no matter their rank and their decision-making power.

DK: So after you do that targeted outreach, you will have the initial meeting. That might be in-person or on video, but it's really important that you put your best foot forward, like we spoke about earlier, and you wear professional attire, you bring business cards, and take yourself seriously because you are the representative of your clients. You want to present a polished version of yourself so that they can take your clients seriously as well.

DK: The next step, and a really helpful part of solidifying the new partnership, is to set an upcoming interview on the spot, so something like, "Hey, it was so nice to meet with you and connect with you. Can we set a time maybe next week that I can bring some candidates to interview with your staff?" This will really help move and progress the partnership forward rather than just leaving things ambiguous or up in the air.

DK: And the last stage after clients are placed in a job, you follow up. This is crucial. Some of you may need to do this for the programs that you're working in, but maybe you don't, and so sending a follow-up email or phone call asking how's it going, what is it like working with our candidates, checking in about more hiring needs and other alternative positions available is a really important step of the job development process.

Define Your Ideal Employer Partner

DK: I think it's an important part of the job development process to also define your ideal employer partner. So this kind of goes back to what we were speaking about before, which was knowing your candidate well, because your ideal employer partner is going to match the candidates and their needs. So we first have to know what those needs are to then be able to identify the company that can meet those needs. So some of the things to consider when you're trying to identify your ideal employer partner is the location. Are they within the service area and accessible to public transportation for your clients? What are the positions available? Do they match your client's skills and areas of interest?

DK: What is the environment like? This is a huge one. I know when I was working in North Carolina, one of our employers was a poultry plant. It was a great and stable first job for many of our clients, but the environment was harsh. It was cold, repetitive actions that caused a lot of hand pain, and so really considering that, is that really going to be your ideal partner for the clients that you're working with? And what is the wage rate that they offer? Does it meet the standard? It's always a bad sign with a potential partner if they say they have a low wage or they say that it's based on the experience.

DK: We want to advocate for our clients with wages that meet their needs to become self-sufficient, and so really taking this into consideration. And then what are the accommodations that they're willing to make? I saw in the Slido many, or there were at least a few comments, about accommodating prayer times and religious practices or religious days off. I think as you are working towards building employer partners, you want to start considering, this is a partner that would learn enough about the clients, the candidates who we are providing them, to accommodate their different cultural and religious needs.

How to Find Job Opportunities

DK: So how do we find these job opportunities? After we start to define the ideal employer partner, then how do we start looking for them? So you can start looking for employer partners on job boards, maybe Glassdoor, Indeed, or LinkedIn. You can reach out to your volunteer network. Like I mentioned before, sending out an email to the volunteer network might not only be helpful for giving you some of that industry insight, but also in connecting you to companies that are looking for talent. I think that you already have the volunteers on board with the work that you're doing. And so it's a step closer to then having them engage you in the workforce that they're involved in.

DK: You may be able to find opportunities through staffing recruiting agencies. I'm sure there are mixed opinions here about this. Some of you may even have policies around not using staffing agencies or working with them. While I was in employment placement work, we had kind of a mixed bag about staffing and recruiting agencies, but it's possible to find a staffing agency that is really aligned with your values and wants to help be kind of a bridge from the clients you're working with to the employer. And I was able to find working with one or two staffing agencies that were really excited about this opportunity to support the work we are doing and connect our clients to jobs.

DK: And the last one is the newcomer community network. This is a really interesting way to find jobs that might not be the first thing that you think of as an employment staff, but tapping into the community network is huge, talking to the candidate themselves. Sometimes you might have a candidate come to you and say, "I heard that... " I'll use an example from my background, "I heard that Marsh Furniture is hiring." This can be kind of a light bulb moment for you of, "Okay, who did you hear that from?" Oftentimes it might come from a community member that they know. And so then approaching the employer and saying, I heard that you were hiring, and try to set up that initial meeting.

Components of a Strong Cold Email or LinkedIn Pitch

DK: All right. The next section we're going to talk about is the components of a strong cold email or LinkedIn pitch. My lovely colleague, Lauren, who you all will meet in just a little bit, is going to drop in the chat a tool that we've provided here at Switchboard: contacting potential employer partners phone and email template. So relying on a template can be really, really helpful just for efficiency, for starting you off on the right foot for doing this cold email or LinkedIn pitch. And as I mentioned, we have a template that you can use. I really encourage that, or a template that you already have.

DK: In addition to starting with the template, there are a few other factors that make a strong cold email or LinkedIn pitch. So using a targeted approach, you'll see there on the screen, sending the email or calling to a person with decision-making power and doing it in a very targeted way. So as I mentioned, finding the right person to connect with rather than going through people who may not be able to have as great of an impact on the partnership opportunity that you're trying to make.

DK: Reference competitors. I think this is a really interesting one as you do your cold email or LinkedIn pitch. I did this a lot as I was working in employment placement. So referencing somebody that you're working with and saying, "The candidates that I'd like to bring to you already work at this furniture company." This really helps lower anxieties and helps the potential employer partner know, "Wow, okay, so if the candidates they're speaking of can work there, our company has some really similar practices. Maybe this will actually be a good fit." I saw this work pretty powerfully in the work, and depending on maybe the size of your city and the types of industries you're working in, this can be a really great tool.

DK: The next one is to assuage anxiety. We encourage you to do this really quickly. As many of you know, and some of you mentioned in the Slido, people get really worried about work authorization or the requirement for sponsorship. So do it really quickly. Let them know that your candidates are authorized to work. They do not require sponsorship. And this can just really lower the temperature right from the jump.

DK: The next one is to request more engagement at a specific time. So as I've mentioned, the goal of this employer partnership is to progress things forward, to have more face time, to connect either in person or virtually. So, doing so by having really targeted language like, "Do you have time to meet next week?" This will subconsciously prompt people to start thinking through their calendar and move that forward.

DK: And the last idea here for making your cold email or LinkedIn pitch strong is to send a polished marketing material. Many of you may have through your organization different kinds of marketing materials, maybe a glossy one pager about the work you do or a blog that somebody wrote. This can really help the potential partner see the work you're doing, see that it's really good work and get on board and be more interested in connecting with you and learning about the candidates that you have.

Additional Preparation for a Strong Phone Pitch

DK: There's some additional preparation that you can do related to having a strong phone pitch. And I know that phone pitching, talking on the phone, can be really scary and uncomfortable. It's not my favorite thing to do, to talk on the phone. But as you do it, the less scary that it will become. And we think that a phone pitch is really important because it's more interpersonal. It will help you connect better with the employer. It's way easier for people to ignore emails than maybe a phone call. And so as much as possible, I would encourage you to pick up the phone and try calling the potential partner, and again, the person with decision-making power.

DK: So I want to just talk about a couple of things that can make your phone pitch a little bit stronger. So you can rely on the template that we put in the chat. Additionally, I would encourage you to practice. Practice is so powerful. It can really help you feel more comfortable with the words that you're saying. It can make you sound more natural, not as robotic. And so practicing what you're going to say is key.

DK: Next is requesting an office tour. So this will allow you to go back. So maybe you've had the conversation on the phone and then saying, "Hey, do you think we could bring some candidates by?" Then you have some time to go back, look for your candidates and have a better idea of the kinds of skills, talents, and competencies that you're looking for.

DK: And the last one is representing your client's needs and wants. So making sure that you include some of that good information of the client qualities that you have. This can really help them increase in interest of, "Wow, this person actually has a lot of people that could really significantly and positively add to our workforce."

Pitch to Large Groups

DK: And the last thing I want to mention in this section is pitching to a large group. So if you are pitching and pitching and screening a lot of people out and really not finding those ideal partners, my next recommendation is that you would pitch to a large group. I have to admit, this is not something I did in my work, but I think it's a really great idea, and I think it can help save time for you and energy. I know we all work so much and maybe are low on energy and capacity, so this might be a really great tool for you. It might seem counterintuitive, but rather than always going to the foot of the employer and saying, "I'd love to work with you; please hire our clients," pitch into larger groups, maybe a chance for us to present ourselves, and then wait and see if the ideal partner will come back and desire and ask to work with us and partner with us. This is actually a really targeted approach to finding the most ideal partner.

4. Maintaining Employer Relationships: Common Challenges and Strategies for Overcoming Them

DK: Okay, the last section is maintaining employer relationships and some common challenges and strategies for overcoming them. So one more time, I want to turn it back to you and ask you to answer a question on Slido.com.

Poll Question

What challenges might job development staff encounter when managing employer partnerships?

DK: Too many points of contact, that's an interesting one. The employer does not treat clients well. No response from the employers, not getting responses. Turnover. Changing of staff, yeah, this is a huge one. I experienced this a lot. We would find a great, great point of contact person with decision-making power, and then their job would change. And it would be like, "Wow, we just have to start completely over."

DK: Job seekers' interests do not match jobs available. Client turnover discourages rehiring. Yes, this can be really discouraging for employment staff, job development staff. No initial interest, safety concerns surrounding limited English. Expiring EAD, that's a really complicated one. Low numbers of potential employees to offer employers. The employer is too strict with the job. Clients not showing up or performing poorly, yes. Constantly asking for EADs. Again, employers may be not totally understanding our clients and their documentation. Limited English. Clients not meeting the requirements of a job. Yeah, you're mentioning a lot of things that create a pretty heavy weight on job development staff.

DK: You're doing all the work to get these employer partners established and then you're coming across all of these challenges. Employer staff not caring about their jobs. Not having enough information about documentation of refugees. Employers requiring in-person interpreters for interviews and onboarding. Competitive job market, that's huge. Client physical restrictions or injured on the job. And employers have a plentiful and surplus list of non-refugee applicants, so it's difficult to convince them to take refugee applicants. Yeah, that competitive market we're talking about.

DK: Oh, this is a really interesting one: employers respond to all applications online only. Oh man, the digital world and how that has changed the process of applying for jobs is huge. You have to go through so many hoops in order to just have a conversation with somebody in person. And I think that that can really speak to working with someone in decision-making power to say, "Is there another process that we could go through if this isn't working for our clients and creating different onboarding opportunities?"

DK: Following safety rules by the employees due to language barriers, yeah. Low client computer literacy, yes. And hard to compete with locals. So I'm seeing a lot of stuff related to the competitive market, how to really help your clients compete with people who are maybe from here, have that social network already established, have that relevant work experience. How can we help our clients to compete with those candidates? Yeah, you all have a lot of different challenges that you encounter when you're trying to manage these employer partnerships. I recognize those and I've experienced those myself. So, thank you so much for sharing them.

Challenges in Employer Partnership Management

DK: Okay, so as you all mentioned, there are so many challenges. Many of the ones here on the screen you mentioned in the Slido, and I'd like to highlight a few of them myself. So job development staff manage large caseloads. And I definitely struggled with this. I think it's really rare not to. And so it can be really hard to maintain employer partnerships when you have so many people to keep track of and maybe clients calling your phone, coming in to walk-in appointments and things like that.

DK: The next one on this slide is clients present complex workplace needs. You all mentioned some of those things. Maybe they... I'm not sure if this is a complex workplace need exactly how we mentioned it here, but you all mentioned the English, potentially not being able to maintain safety standards because of those, things like that. So our clients are bringing in really complex things, and we're needing employer partners to understand those complexities in order to maintain that relationship.

DK: Employers demand prompt responses from staff. This is a really interesting one. We might not be able to respond to people right away as we manage these really large caseloads. And so this can really affect the employer partnership and the ability to maintain that connection and communication and flow of our candidates into their company's workforce.

DK: Job seekers' complex life situations may affect reliability. I remember my previous work, a situation where one of my clients had a child who ran away, and that person was the driver of a big carpool situation. And so because they were in crisis, the whole carload didn't show up to the company and the employer partner called me and was like, "Oh my gosh, where are all these people?" And I think that's just an example of complex life situations that we all bring, not just our newcomer clients, but also ourselves. And this is something to really keep in mind and can be a really big challenging component of maintaining that employer partnership and making sure that our employer partners understand these complex life situations that our clients have.

DK: And the last one is mismatch between job availability and candidate interest. Sometimes they need a huge number of talent to meet their needs, and we are just not able to do that. And so that might kind of lower our partnership, might make them not think we're as valuable of a partner as they are looking for. So these are the challenges that we might face along with all of the really great ones that you all mentioned.

What are boundaries?

DK: So next, I want to move on to boundaries. And this fits into how to maintain employer partnerships, because you might be sitting here thinking, "Yeah, these are all the challenges that we face, but how can we fix this? You know, we've got so much on our plates." And so I think it's really important to speak about having boundaries. Boundaries are a set of limits, and they help us to define appropriate, safe, and effective behaviors.

DK: There are different kinds of boundaries—professional, relational, physical, and work-life boundaries—but today I mostly want to speak about the professional boundaries and why they are essential. So they are essential because they help establish an atmosphere of mutual respect. Even though it might not feel like it when you're setting a boundary, it actually does create this mutual respect. It can feel really counterintuitive, but I've seen that in my work and in my own personal life. And it's a really cool part of setting boundaries. It can also reinforce that the relationship is professional. So by setting boundaries, you are showing them, “Hey, I have my limits. This is what we do in our workplace.” And that can be really an important piece of building out your partnership. It also supports equity, as all clients receive consistent services, treatment, and care. And it helps you protect your personal space and work-life balance, which is highly critical to your sustainability in this profession.

Why are boundaries with employers important?

DK: So you'll see on the next slide a list of the different reasons. I mentioned some of them here, but we'll go into a little more detail. So, boundaries with employers first builds trust and establishes safety. I mentioned that earlier might seem counterintuitive, but it's a really great way to help bring that trust into the relationship. It also empowers the employers, so it shows... having boundaries shows your employer partnership partner where your role starts and where their role begins. So it helps employers know what's our role and what's theirs. And that's really important because sometimes they can think you're going to do things that really are not within your role and will potentially lead to burnout. It will also provide you with legal protection. Setting boundaries will ensure that you are having upfront conversations with the employer partner to communicate that it is ultimately their responsibility to create a safe and secure environment.

DK: It will ensure consistent and equitable service delivery for your clients to have these boundaries. So if you're spending all of your time on the phone with an employer partner that is high need and is asking you to do all of these things, you might not be allocating the time that your clients deserve and need. It will also maintain your organization's reputation. So when you set those boundaries, you show them what is your role and what is their role. It helps you not over-promise and under-deliver, and that will overall maintain your organization's reputation.

DK: And lastly, I mentioned a moment ago burnout. I think having boundaries is crucial to helping to prevent staff burnout. I think this is a huge topic in our work that we do, and so I really encourage you to start thinking about ways that you can incorporate some of these boundaries in order to help keep your role more sustainable. Maybe an example of this is driving your clients to their first day of work. There were many, many early mornings where I was on the road to the poultry plant to bring clients to their first day, and it was really hard coming back and working with clients the rest of the day, so I think setting that boundary and making sure that the employer partner knows what you're really able to do and what is sustainable for you.

How do I set boundaries without sounding rude?

DK: Okay, so you might be wondering, how do I set boundaries without being rude? We want to just give you a few guidelines to go to lean on as you try to start setting boundaries with your employer partners. First is to validate the concern, next is set the limit, provide an explanation, and offer an alternative. So these guidelines can really help you strike that perfect balance of setting the boundary while also maintaining professionalism and showing them that you're not trying to be rude, you're really just setting a boundary.

DK: So we have a couple of examples of how this might look. The first one is, "I understand that you'd like to schedule an interview tomorrow. Unfortunately, I am unable to source candidates for you with that turnaround. I would be happy to send you some resumes today and ask these candidates to interview next week." So I think in this example, you are validating the concern. You're showing them, “I understand your urgency here,” but you're also setting the limit and you're saying, "I'm not able to do that today," and you're offering an alternative. "I would be happy to send you some resumes and then see if we can have the client's interview next week."

DK: The next example is, "Thank you for letting me know that this employee is having car trouble and did not come to work today. I'm sorry for the impact on the workday. I'm sure that was stressful. I have meetings and I can't provide a transportation solution for this employee, but I will call them and give you an update by the end of the day." So I think this one really highlights validating their concern, showing that you understand that this was an inconvenience to their workday, it caused some challenges, and you're offering a sort of alternative by saying, "I'm going to call the candidate and I'll be in touch with you." So I think these are really good examples, and I think this is, again, just something of practice. You might need to kind of even practice talking points of how to deliver these boundaries in a way that strikes the balance of secure in the boundary but not rude.

How do I set expectations with employers?

DK: So how do I actually do this? How do I set expectations with employers? The first thing is to use partnership language. This means that we're not just coming to them for solutions, but we're also inviting them to come back with solutions. So something like, "We're happy to do X, Y, Z for you, but as partners we need A, B, C." That's really asking them to come to the table and bring what they can bring as well and showing them this is a partnership. This isn't a one-way street.

DK: The next one is to outline the services that you can offer the employer and what you need from them. So this kind of goes back to the partnership language, but it's just really important to be very explicit about what you can offer them. Maybe I can bring the clients to your office and help them fill out the applications, but I need you to set up the interview with the hiring manager. So that's really showing them what you can do and what you're asking them to do.

DK: The third thing as you set expectations is to remind them that the newcomer job seeker has the same complexity as U.S.-born job seekers. We all have life complexities, and so really helping them understand that people are going to come with a variety of different challenges, and obviously we're wanting to make sure we still do that with the strengths-based approach, but at the same time balancing making sure that they know that, as we all have complex levels of life, so do the clients that they are thinking about hiring or are already hiring.

DK: The fourth note we want to make about setting expectations with employers is sharing your workplace context and typical turnaround time. So we've mentioned a lot here, capacity, and just how we all have really heavy workloads and maybe not a lot of time. So making sure that your employer partner understands that you might not be able to respond the same day, sharing with them, "This is kind of the context we're working with," and then stating, we always try to respond within 24 to 48 hours or something like this to help them understand and not be disappointed or think that you're not wanting to respond.

DK: The fifth thing is preview that early job placement work comes with a learning curve. I think every one of you here has probably seen things go a little bit awry, challenges come up, and so really helping the employer partner understand that there's going to be a learning curve. People are going to take time to learn things, and if they can provide patience that these clients are often really hardworking and will be ready for the challenge if they just have the time and space to move through that learning curve.

DK: And then the last one is to describe how and when they can expect to contact you. So maybe email is the best way. As you're on the road driving your clients to different interviews, maybe it's best for them to email you so you can get back to it when you get to your desk, or maybe a phone call is better for that very reason. But really just setting the expectations so they have that clarity and really understand when they can expect to hear from you.

How do I maintain an employer partnership?

DK: So the last point I want to make is how to maintain an employer partnership. There are a few different tips and tricks that I think really worked for me: creating a reminder for monthly follow up, making sure that you're staying in really regular connection with the employers so that they don't lose sight of the candidates that you may have in the pipeline to work at their companies. Inviting the employer to advocacy or volunteer events: this can be a really unique way of maintaining that employer partner because it can give them more insight into the work you're doing, the clients you're working with, the great strength and resilience that your clients bring to the table.

DK: You can form an employer advisory council and extend invitations. This might look like you inviting folks to come and provide you with advice. In this instance, you would pull people who are leaders in their industry and give you suggestions about where you can find additional employer partners to connect with and ask them if they would be willing to consult looking at resumes or talking with candidates to help them prepare for interviews. I think this is a really great way to engage your employer partners and bring all the value that they bring into your work.

DK: And lastly, you can share your social media newsletter or success stories. I think this can be powerful in keeping the work you are doing at the forefront of your employer partners' minds and their workforce needs.

Q&A Panel

DK: Okay, that brings us to our Q&A section. I would love to introduce you to my colleague Lauren Bowden. I think she's going to come off of mute and share a little bit about her background, and then we're going to answer some of your questions.

Lauren Bowden: Hey, everybody. Thank you so much, Danica, for the introduction and for all the great content so far. As Danica mentioned, my name is Lauren Bowden, and I work as a Technical Advisor of Economic Empowerment. I provide technical assistance to workforce programs, but also enterprise programs and financial capabilities programs, throughout the United States. I actually started as an AmeriCorps myself, at the IRC Atlanta office. I worked as the job placement associate, and I provided job placement assistance for clients in our RSS state grant program, helped a little bit with our Matching Grant program and then moved into career programs where I worked for about seven years, so it's really lovely to be here with you all.

LB: We've been getting some good questions in the chat, and if you haven't already and you have a question, go ahead and put it in the chat now because we're going to start answering some of those.

LB: Okay, so Danica, I have some good questions for us that we've been getting from some of our attendees today. One question that I have for you is,

We are talking a lot about all of the various ways to reach out to our employer partners, all the ways to connect with all of these different opportunities. How do you stay organized as a person who is doing all of this kind of outreach?

LB: And happy to take this or happy to give it to you, whatever you feel more comfortable with.

DK: Yeah, that's a great question. I think I'll answer and then I'll let you give your perspective.

LB: Sure.

DK: Because I think we all have different ways of organizing ourselves and, like I mentioned, we wear so many different hats and we have a lot of things to balance in this work. And so I think for me, the way that I have typically stayed organized is really trying to time block my time. So maybe that means, I know that every Friday I'm going to spend a little bit of time with employer partnership work, so sending emails, and responding to people in my employer network or maybe trying to reach out to new employer partners, things like that. Time blocking every Wednesday morning and every Thursday morning, I take people to job interviews. And I know that this might not be doable for everyone. I know that sometimes you have to be at the whim of the employer partner, but I think that that's even a way to kind of establish boundaries for yourself is saying to an employer partner, "Hey, we do job interviews on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. Will that work with you or with your company and your workforce needs and your HR needs?" and things like that. So I think the time blocking method has been really helpful for me in the past, and I think it allows for equity over my workload, and also making sure that I'm putting the priority on the things that need priority and setting those boundaries and maintaining those relationships. How about you, Lauren?

LB: I think that's such a good suggestion. I think if you don't set aside specific time, it can be really easy to always be in this mode where you're reacting because the phone is ringing and there are clients in the lobby and you're getting emails and you have meetings, all of these things. So really sort of blocking off and giving yourself that time. I think other things that, somebody got it a little bit when they were talking about, I don't know, one of the ways that they're working with their employer partners when you did a Slido is that having point people assigned to work with employer partners can be helpful, so that the communication is really managed versus having multiple staff people reach out to that employer partner and then getting a little bit confused.

LB: Something that I saw work relatively well is creating a spreadsheet for your team. Maybe you're a team of one right now, but maybe you have more employment specialists working than just you, and writing down the name of the company and the lead, the person you talk to, and sort of giving it a rating like, is this in the red? Are we not doing great with this employer partner? Is it in the yellow, things are okay? Is it in the green? Things are awesome. Like putting a little bit of a color coding there and then any kind of notes. And I think that that can help you. It can help everyone sort of see what employer partners are there, but also what the state of the relationship is and help you remember, “Okay, this is the last thing that we talked about, and this relationship is only doing okay. Maybe it's time for me to reach out and see what I can do, see if I can't reengage and really improve our relationship in some kind of way.”

DK: Yeah, I love that. And I think that that even supports with potential turnover in your office of really keeping that record and not losing the information. I know when I came on in one of my roles, I was the only person, and there had been a lot of partnerships in the past, but there was just no record of it, so I kind of had to go through a lot of different routes to figure out who are our already-existing partnerships with employers, and continue to build those. So I really love the record-keeping piece of that as well.

LB: Yeah, it can kind of help an awkward conversation when you call and they're like, “We worked with you for 10 years or something like that. I don't even know.”

LB: We have been getting a lot of questions. I would say the majority of the questions are about,

How do you suggest that you have these conversations with employer partners when the majority of your caseload is low English and potentially has less sort of formal professional skills? Like how do we talk to our employer partners about these candidates and how do we get them on board?

LB: And again, I can take it, you can take it, just let me know.

DK: Yeah, you go ahead and answer first and then I'll add in.

LB: Yeah, sure. So, absolutely want to validate that that's a tricky situation, but I think what Danica was saying earlier about really using this strengths-based pitch, I think it works regardless of what population that you're working with. Absolutely, we have candidates that have less education and they have less English, etcetera, but that doesn't mean that they're unskilled laborers. I actually don't believe that some people just don't have skills. And one of the ways we know they have skills is they were able to navigate themselves into a position where they were able to resettle their family in another country and able to survive. And so I think what can be helpful is talking to the candidates about the skills that they have that were able to keep them alive. "Were you farming? Do you have agricultural skills? Were you taking care of your family? Do you have caretaking skills or homemaking skills? Did you take care of animals? Do you have animal husbandry skills?"

LB: We have a blog post in the Switchboard resource repository specifically about making resumes for candidates like these that sort of outlines how to go through and ask those kinds of questions to candidates, so I think that one thing is to really try to focus on the things that the candidates do have. And then I also think from the perspective of the employer partner, having access to candidates that do not require any kind of sponsorship—that is huge for them. They don't have to pay $10,000 a person to get access to this talent. But also, being able to work with folks who come with you, right? You're the employment specialist that's going to work with them. You're going to help them with the onboarding. You're probably going to help them connect to an interpreter. You're going to help them with the application process with setting up interviews. People pay staffing agencies to do all this work, and here you are doing it for free.

LB: And then the final thing I would say is that there is research the Tent Partnership for Refugees and Deloitte did that suggests that refugee candidates have lower turnover, so I think that's the other thing that is really in it for them other than like we know our candidates, even if they don't have the best spoken English are awesome people, is that, they tend to stay longer in jobs, and it's very expensive when there is turnover. Anything else that you would add there, Danica?

DK: Yeah, no, I love everything you said. I think what I was thinking about is the strengths-based pitch, and I think you communicated it really eloquently that almost the cost-benefit is really high for them to bring on these people, even though your clients, even though they don't maybe have that English language level, there will be so much that they will benefit that it's worth maybe the challenge that they are perceiving it as to have lower English language level speakers on their workforce. So yeah, I think you did an excellent job talking about the strengths-based approach there. And hopefully some of this has given you all some confidence about bringing that to your potential employer partners and having that internal confidence that it's not a huge disadvantage. Even if they are communicating that back to you, really kind of pushing the limit there and seeing if they will start to reframe what it looks like to hire these lower English level clients that you're bringing to them.

LB: Yeah, and something else that you mentioned earlier, Danica, that I think could help in that kind of conversation we're talking about is referencing other competitor partnerships, right? So if you have any employer partners right now that are willing to hire folks with low-level English and things are going well, asking them to potentially provide a testimonial or at least referencing them when you're talking to other employer partners can help the employer partner feel a little bit better. If it's working somewhere else, okay, maybe it'll work here too. We can figure it out. We can have language buddies where one person speaks a little bit more English and they're translating something like this.

DK: Oh yeah, I'm really glad you brought that up. I think that's huge. And I can't speak strongly enough about how referencing those employer partners can be powerful in your process of building your partnership network. So I'm really glad you brought it up in that perspective as well. Thank you for adding that in.

LB: You got it. Okay, let's look at another question here. So another question is,

What are some accommodations that you might ask for? You mentioned some of them, I think, but what are any other accommodations you might ask for? An employer partner, if they're like, yes, we'll work with you, we'll be your partner. What are the asks that you want to make of them?

DK: Yeah, of course, the first thing I think that comes to mind is accommodating people's different religious needs, whether that be a room that they allocate for people to pray or some flexibility with their scheduled break times to match when candidates are able to do the different practices that they're wanting to do. That's the first and foremost thing that comes to mind.

DK: In my former roles, I think that I... Sometimes with transportation challenges, I know that you all brought that up as an issue. It's a widespread issue across the whole country with employment. We all know how challenging that is. We've requested accommodations for scheduling for either... "Would you... Are you able to adjust your start time to either meet the bus time for when the bus arrives or that will accommodate a carpool setup?" Let's see what other accommodations... Do you have any that come to mind?

LB: Those were some good ones. Yeah, definitely working with the bus schedule or providing, in some cases, they'll provide a bus if they're a large-enough manufacturing plant, often a food processing. So that's something that you can ask for. Scheduling around a school schedule is often helpful. One accommodation one time that was helpful for clients is that the employer partner only would text someone's schedule. And so for clients that had limited digital literacy, it was really hard for them to navigate the app. And so it was just a simple, "Could you just print this for them?" And then all of a sudden we had less absenteeism and people seemed to understand more what was going on.

LB: I think on the other, like we're spending a lot of time and I think it's good talking about clients who have lower level English, et cetera. But I think also on the other end of things, one way that I was able to help clients with higher levels of English and, or education, like sneak in... not sneak in, but get opportunities that they deserved in more of an office or admin type roles was asking if employer partners would be willing to set up paid internship opportunities with an opportunity to interview for a full-time job at the end so that the candidate could get some experience working in that environment. And it sort of made the employer partner a little bit less nervous. So it was sort of a win-win there. So yeah, those are some things.

DK: I love that. I was also thinking, we're talking about a lot of accommodations in the workplace. I think in my past work, I also advocated for accommodations in the onboarding process. And in the application process, I think, there's some nuance there because obviously if they're adjusting their onboarding process, they have to make sure it's equitable for all applicants, not just ours. They can't... Employers can't always accommodate to a level that would make it easier for our clients to get jobs and other people to not. But I think that that was really powerful approaching the employer and saying, you know, this very long application, digital application online is really challenging for our candidates to do. Some of them don't have digital literacy. Is there an alternative that we could do in order to even having maybe an interpreter involved and have it be more spoken? So I think that there's a lot of accommodations that can be had through that early stages, the early stages as well in the onboarding process.

LB: That's so true. Those long applications were the death of me. And sometimes you couldn't even enter in foreign experience or foreign references. And so it was really difficult.

LB: Another question that we got twice was,

You mentioned briefly that some folks feel a little bit uncomfortable working with staffing agencies or recruiting agencies. What is the hesitation there that you've seen that makes people a little bit uncomfortable? Why not work with agencies?

DK: Yeah, I think that there's probably a variety of reasons for why people are uncomfortable with this. The first thing that comes to mind is the potential for a staffing agency to want to take a cut and your clients not actually getting the full wage that they should be, whereas if they had gone directly to a company and been hired on directly, maybe they would have started at a higher wage. So this is obviously really problematic. We're wanting our clients to get the best wage possible to help support their self-sufficiency.

DK: I think this is a bit of a more nuanced one, but the other thing that comes to mind is value alignment. And I think a lot of staffing agencies can be like really, really rapid turnaround, quick jobs, in and out. And it's not the quality that we're really looking for of that known understanding of who our clients are and the match with the company that we're placing them in. So in my past experience, there were staffing agencies that we tried to work with that did a really excellent job of together with us learning who our clients were, selecting really good jobs and helping to be that bridge.

DK: And there were other ones who, as much as we tried to communicate who our clients were and really build that understanding, that the values weren't there, they weren't aligned. And we were having huge amounts of turnover or companies being... We would bring a client... Or a client would get a job through a staffing agency. They show up at work and the staffing agency would be like, "I didn't know you didn't speak English." And then we'd just lay them off. And there's just huge disappointment there for the client, for us. And so I think it can be either a really excellent bridge into employment and one route, or it can be the opposite and it can really not serve anybody, the company, the clients, or us as employment staff. So you really have to suss out who are you working with and do their values align? So yeah. Anything you want to add, Lauren?

LB: I think, yes, all of that is absolutely correct. I think the major thing is what you were saying, which is that they ultimately are working for the employer partner. And in most cases they're paid by the employer partner. And so, unlike us, we are working for our client population, right? And so there can just be like a misalignment of allegiances, I think. And sometimes I think some staffing agencies are really able to see how those things are intertwined and understand that the fates are bound up in each other. Like, the only way to make the employer happy is to make sure that clients are in jobs where they can stay, they can be retained. They're good jobs. And other times not as much. But yeah, the fast pace, taking a cut of client's wages. And then also sometimes they'll do things like encourage clients to take pay cards. So when a client gets hired on, here's your pay card, but that takes another percentage, small percentage, but still, of a client's wages—these kinds of things you have to watch out for.

DK: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. Okay. Thank you all so much for these great questions. Thank you, Lauren, for supporting me by asking the questions and giving your great input.

Conclusion

Reviewing Learning Objectives

DK: I want to finish off this webinar by just reviewing our learning objectives. Today, we learned to describe the importance of employer partnerships in the context of job placement for ORR-eligible populations. We learned to identify key considerations and benefits for employers and newcomer employees when establishing and maintaining partnerships. Third, we learned to implement best practice job development approaches to effectively support newcomer clients in securing high-quality jobs. And we learned to recognize common challenges in maintaining employer relationships and name strategies for overcoming them.

Feedback Survey

DK: So I'd like to invite you to scan the QR code and help us by answering a five-question survey. This only takes 60 seconds, and it will really help us to improve our training and technical assistance. You should also see the link in the chat. So if you can do that, that would be really fantastic.

Recommended Resources

DK: And lastly, I just want to share that we have some recommended resources for you. You will be receiving all of these recommended resources within the next 24 hours. These come from our resource library. So the tools that we already put in the chat, the contacting potential employer partners phone and email template. We also have five mapping strategies for employer outreach, a video for tips for effective employer conversations, a Switchboard guide supporting clients during times of economic hardship, doing job development in an economic recession, and ORR funding opportunity employer engagement program. So you will receive those to your email.

Stay Connected

DK: And stay connected to Switchboard by visiting our website or submitting a technical assistance request, and following us on LinkedIn. And we're so glad you all were here today. Thank you for joining us.

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