

Promising Practices for Overcoming Multiple Barriers to Work

Even in a strong labor market, people who face multiple challenges to employment (such as low education levels, lack of work history, long-term benefit receipt, homelessness, or mental health issues) still have a hard time finding and keeping jobs. This doesn't mean they can't or don't want to work, but they may have trouble convincing employers to hire them or have trouble managing challenges to maintaining employment. If these barriers seem tough in a good job market, imagine the stress that comes when the job market becomes more competitive. Furthermore, as state and federal policy makers are looking to increase work requirements for social support programs, the need to help these individuals find and keep employment becomes even more crucial.

In a recent literature review, as well as a recent strategy development project in Charlotte, NC, ACS uncovered the following 10 promising practices and innovations for organizations or policymakers who are committed to helping those with multiple barriers find, and keep, employment to implement:



1. Assess the whole picture.

An accurate assessment of where a person is can help determine the additional wrap-around supports an individual needs, identify realistically how “job or career ready¹” they are, and help make recommendations on the type of work that will be the best match. A comprehensive assessment can set someone up for a successful job match and ensure they receive needed supports, and increases the likelihood for retention. For example, someone who struggles with alcohol addiction may find it difficult to get up in the morning and prefer an afternoon or evening shift, which will increase the likelihood of job retention. Someone else who has social anxiety may not want a job where they will need to interact with customers.



2. Develop an individualized plan.

Individuals may see themselves in a specific light and not recognize limitations of the job market. Conversations with case managers or social workers can help set realistic expectations about wages and training for available jobs. There is a higher likelihood of success if pathways are outlined, a plan is created, and an individual can see progress being made. There should be a focus on long-term outcomes to help encourage and motivate individuals who face multiple barriers.

¹There are several definitions for job or career ready. When working in collaboration with others, clarify you are all using the same definition.



3. Take a team approach.

In addition to a case manager and a job coach, some successful models bring together a team of people to increase coordination and accountability for each individual job seeker. Depending on the individualized plan, this could include family members, a therapist, housing specialists, or others who provide supportive services. In most models, this team meets on a regular basis (often weekly) with each other to coordinate services and offer updates.



4. Build and strengthen employer relationships.

Successful models think about the employers' customers and understand their point of view, the skills and attributes they are seeking in candidates, and consider the company culture. One promising practice includes inviting employers to participate in developing supportive strategies for employees. A program that has multiple individuals hired with one employer can strengthen employer relationships. And remember, the greater the number of potential employer contacts you can maintain, the better!



5. Create an effective communication flow internally.

Communication is key at all steps of the process. Communication flows help synchronize knowledge from those preparing job seekers for work, those working with hired individuals and employers, and external support providers to increase job match, hiring, and retention. The methods used to communicate (meetings, phone calls, etc.) are not as critical as defining the important regular, ongoing touch points and processes. For example, someone working with employers and hired individuals may have information that could be useful for a case manager preparing an individual for an interview with that same employer.



6. Provide ongoing support and retention services.

Retention starts on day one. Retention is easier when both the individual and the employer receive the supports they need. The most successful job retention efforts provide supports that last for at least a year and are meaningful to the job seeker and help the employer.



7. Empower the job seeker with more, not less information.

An individual is better able to make informed decisions with key information about career pathways, career advancement, and how changes to their employment will affect their benefits. For example, with information about how higher wages from a new job will affect their public benefits (such as housing credits, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or child care), some people may choose to drop their benefits while others may choose to take a different job that would ensure they could keep some or all of their benefits.



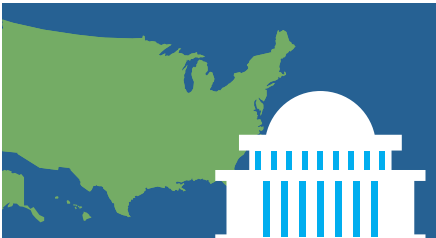
8. Leverage community partners to provide supportive services.

Consider where community partners can be helpful in designing a coordinated care system. For example, one workforce development model leveraged the expertise of training partners to provide classes in the evenings and condense their curriculums to better accommodate program participants.



9. Start slow (and small) to run fast (and big).

Ramping up a model or a pilot program can take a lot of resources and time, and it is critical to develop relationships with employers and community partners, train specialized staff for a new way of doing business, and enable integrated service delivery. This means it also will take time to see a significant impact, but the upfront investment will be well worth it.



10. Mind the context.

Context matters for successful implementation. State and local policies, political relationships, industry culture, philanthropic involvement, and labor markets all have an impact on how practices and programs are implemented. Just because a practice works in one region, does not mean it will work in another.

Want to learn more? Here are 4 current workforce development models and approaches that incorporate many of the promising practices and innovations listed above.

- **Supported Employment and Individual Placement and Support (IPS)**: Rather than offering extensive pre-employment training, IPS focuses on providing rapid access to jobs and then providing supportive services to job holders.
- **Single Coordinated Care Plan (SCCP)**: SCCP builds an individualize system of support around each client, including services, family and friends, all working together to help individuals succeed in work.
- **WorkAdvance**: This “dual customer” approach combines long-term supportive services for workers with a sector-based strategy for engaging employers with high labor needs.
- **Motivational Interviewing and Coaching**: This standardized, evidence-based approach to facilitating behavior change was adapted from the health care field and is an emerging practice in workforce development to help jobseekers with barriers to employment overcome ambivalence and anxiety about behavioral changes.