



Working Together to Strengthen Communities

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS

**A WORKING GUIDE FOR SUSTAINING
PARTNERSHIPS WITH EMPLOYERS**



Prepared by:

KRISTEN THOMS

KAYLA BRIEN

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About This Guide

Equitable access to sustainable employment in the labour market is vital to enhance the quality of life and social well being of marginalized job seekers. Multi-barrier job seekers are marginalized out of the labour market because of gaps in their resumes, or a lack of perceived employable skills or experience. Company recruitment practices can further push out under-represented groups through perceived stereotypes or even adding unnecessary steps to the overall recruitment process. Although there are multiple approaches to creating an inclusive labour market, this guide will be focusing on one strategy, employer engagement.

This guide was developed to compliment the presentation "Leveraging Employer Partnerships to Create an Inclusive Labour Market". The content reflects experiences and best practices of Quint Development Corporation's Core Neighbourhoods at Work Program.

Quint Development Corporation is a unique not-for-profit organization, focused on creating economic opportunities that help to strengthen communities and improve social conditions for residents in Saskatoon, SK. The Core Neighbourhoods at Work (CNAW) Program provides holistic support equipping individuals with the tools needed to overcome barriers and obtain employment. CNAW employs one staff member in the Employer Relations role to engage with employers to create connections and secure opportunities for job seekers.



Breakdown of Sections

01 Getting your organization ready

What does your organization need to do internally that supports employer engagement?

02 Engaging employers

How does your organization approach employers strategically?

03 Taking a dynamic approach to employer engagement

How can your organization cultivate long-term relationships rather than one-offers?

Although the contents of this guide are presented in a linear format, employer engagement activities happen simultaneously.

Getting Your Organization Ready

"Time spent on hiring,
is time well spent."

Robert Half

Job development plays an integral role in supporting job seekers with their employment search. Successful job development is dependent on a person's ability to identify, engage, and secure partnerships with employers that will hire from the population that your organization works with.

Finding the Right Fit

The role of a Job Developer is unique because you are working on both the supply and the demand side of the labour force. Transiency in this role is a strain on individual employment programs because it is difficult for an organization to continually have to rebuild relationships.

A blend of human services and business knowledge is ideal, but not necessary. For the right candidate you can support professional development to strengthen overall capacity in both areas.

However, it is vital that the person who is stepping into this role has an understanding of the population that you are working with.

Social Background versus Business Background. Using professional development to balance the two.

Suggestions to strengthen social experiences and/or awareness:

- Participate in community events
- Attend conferences in the areas of social justice, reconciliation, diversity, mental health, etc.
- Soft skill development, specifically assertive communication
- www.ceric.ca/resources/

Resources to strengthen knowledge in the business industry:

- Connect with your local economic development authority
- alis.alberta.ca/media/1515/labourmarketinfo.pdf
- www.jobbank.gc.ca/explorecareers
- Paid resource "Job Development" series www.evolutiongroupinc.com/recordings

TOP 5 SKILLS DURING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS TO KEEP IN MIND:

Confident

Assertive in working with employers and able to set expectations on what is needed from the relationship.

Influential

The cycle of this roll is seeking connections, establishing relationships and 'marketing' the job seeker you're working with.

Responsive

Job seekers needs are dynamic, and so is the labour market. Staying updated and informed on the skill set of the job seekers you are working with and labour market trends is critical.

Advocate

Ability to ensure equitable relationships and to address the situation should the relationship be unbalanced.

Persistent

Innovative in their approach to employer development. Ability to think outside the box of a phone call or an email to attract employers.



It is important to make sure that employer engagement strategies reflect what the job seekers needs are.

Strategic Communication

Set time for strategic conversations to learn about the skill sets and goals of the job seekers accessing your organizations services. Intentional conversations align employer development strategies to the actual needs of the job seekers accessing your services.

BEST PRACTICES FROM THE CORE NEIGHBOURHOODS AT WORK PROGRAM

File Reviews: One on one meetings that happen biweekly between Employer Relations and Employment Coordinators.

Purpose: Connect and strengthen internal relationships with front end staff. Gain a better understanding of the job seekers accessing our organizations services to better scope employer development work

Process: Employment Coordinators bring participant files into the meeting and highlight qualifications, previous experience, desired career path and potential barriers to employment.

Benefits: Guides approach to new employer reach outs by knowing job seeker skill range to focus on the industry that makes sense and is reflective of job seeker needs. Having a snap shot of the job seeker's work history and challenges they may face allows us to identify the ideal work environment the person can thrive in.

Morning Check Ins/ Weekly Meetings: Meetings lead by either the Program Manager or a different member of the employment team.

Purpose: Platform to share ideas and solutions that are encountered daily in the office. This develops consistency within the program and allows for everyone to be on the same page when case planning and keeping up to date with process.

Benefits: Strengthen employer development practices through relaying more detailed information on current employment opportunities. Ability to obtain more information from staff that otherwise would not be given in a file review.

EXAMINING YOUR CURRENT PRACTICE

Reflecting on your own internal approach to creating time for strategic conversations, identify the ways your organization is currently doing this.

For each strategic channel of communication, what purpose is the driving factor behind it?

What benefits have you seen within this approach to employer engagement as a result of these conversations?

Is this intentional communication effective to discover what the needs of the job seekers you are working with?

If yes, what information are you collecting about your job seekers that can strengthen your employer outreach?

If not, what can be done differently? Or, is it worth continuing to invest resources into?

Using External Resources To Support Employer Engagement

Labour Market Information

Labour Market Information (LMI) provides an in depth understanding that supports job seekers in making an informed decision when seeking, applying, and preparing for work. LMI also can be used to get your organization ready for employer engagement. Think of it as your compass; it points you in the direction of the employers that will offer a greater chance to hire your clients. In other words, using LMI will give you the information to target sustainable employment opportunities for the population you work with.

It is important to be mindful when collecting LMI, as it can be misleading. For instance, the ability for under-represented job seekers to respond to the increase demand for labour in the more productive categories of employment is low. So even if there are jobs available in certain sectors, it does not mean that those positions are accessible for everyone. Some people do not have the necessary skills or experience to tap into these opportunities.



Environmental Scan Of Your Community

What other organizations are offering employment supports in your community? Who else is connecting job seekers to employers? There is great strength in knowing what is available to your clients and to work together as to not compete and duplicate services.

By being informed and updated on other programs you can best support your clients in finding employment. For example, if you are working with a client who wants to work for company X and a community partner has a pre-existing relationship with that company, it is better to refer your client to that organization then to try and establish a new employer relationship.

How familiar are you with the employment support organizations in your community? Rate your knowledge on a 10-point scale. Why did you rate yourself as you did? What steps can you take to strengthen your knowledge and relationship with community partners?

COLLECTING LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Where to find labour market information

Local economic development authority: Provides accessible and updated labour market trends as well as in depth information on key industries for your region.

Job Sites: Scanning job postings to see what current employment opportunities are available locally.

Business Media: Scanning the news for information on major disruptions or growth. This can include layoffs, upcoming store openings and major construction projects.

What information to collect:

Demographics: Education levels, annual income, labour force participation rates, home and vehicle ownership.

Job Requirements: Experience/education required, length of employment, salary, job location, certification needed, criminal record/substance test, shift times, and work set-up costs (i.e. uniform, equipment).

Sector Information: Identify key industries in your region, seasonal flows, hiring cycles and determine entry points into the industry.

How this information works to your advantage

By understanding the availability of local employment opportunities and labour market trends, you can support the population you work with to career path into the industry that fits their needs.

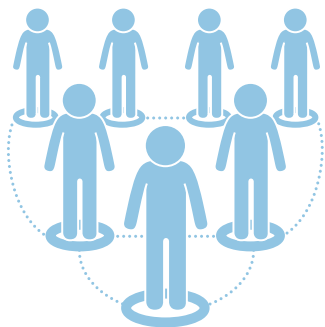
Information is everywhere. Think of 5 additional resources to find labour market information. For each resource determine what information to collect and how this information can be used to your advantage.



HOW ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

What does it mean to build and establish your presence with employers

Your local chamber of commerce, economic development authority, and business associations are a great source for labour market information. They also play a key role in connecting you to local companies. The more involved you are, the more familiar you become and you begin to establish your presence with employers. Building your presence means not coming with an agenda to recruit employers to hire your job seekers. It is to position yourself within that network, to become part of that business community.



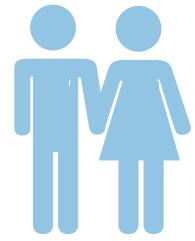
How can you tap into activities within your business community? Are there learning opportunities, committees, or networking events that you can attend?

Does it make sense to promote your services through these channels? Can your organization benefit from advertisements through e-newsletters, magazines, or social media features whose audience base is mainly employers?



Engaging Employers

Engaging Employers is like dating with the purpose of finding a long term commitment.



Making the decision to date and figuring out your "type"

Employer Engagement: It is important to identify the needs of your organization and which industries/sectors will have the most sustainable employment opportunities for your clients.

Identifying different avenues to meet new people

Employer Engagement: Conducting environmental scans and exploring labour market information to determine avenues to connect with employers.

Presenting your authentic self on the first date, seeing what you have in common

Employer Engagement: Understanding that reach-out messaging and the initial conversation with an employer has to be unique to each employer that you engage with.

Getting past the first date with the goal of having a long lasting relationship

Employer Engagement: Meaningful relationships have a level of investment on both sides and are not successful if one side is continually pushing an agenda. To ensure you get past the initial meeting, engage employers in conversations that do not always include the topic of hiring.

Company Websites & Social Media

Online information is a critical piece in engaging employers. Consider this:

- Company websites provide industry information along with a general understanding of the businesses mission and vision.
- Social media streams provide insight on the organization that would not necessarily be accessible on the company's website such as workplace culture.
- Social media allows you to be innovative and increases accessibility to the employer community. Facebook messaging, sending a tweet, or connecting with a company's employee on LinkedIn can connect you to an employer faster than a traditional email would.

Online scans will give you a feel on who a company is and if they are a good fit for the clients that you work with.



Approaching Employers



There is no magic message when it comes to approaching an employer. You need to identify your motivation to connect with a specific business to determine your unique message.

What Is Your Reason?

Reasons to connect with an employer:

- For the company to see value in hiring residents that live in the same community they do business in.
- The company has corporate social responsibility goals.
- The company has multiple sustainable job opportunities available for your clients that would be of interest for job seekers with a variety of skill sets or experience.
- Your organization has an event to recruit for and based on your research the company would be a good fit for this event.

Reflection: Identify 5 current employers that your organization is working with. For each employer, list the reasons why you are working with them. Do these answers surprise you? Are your reasons seeing the intended results?

Think of three additional companies that you would like to connect with. Why did you come up with these three? How would you incorporate that reason in your initial reach out message/meeting?

Approach an employer like a first date with the purpose of collecting as much information as you can. This can include:



- Hiring cycles and practices
- Recruitment needs, qualifications
- A sense of the work culture.

From there you can gauge whether this is a fit for your program and put forward the best way to partner.

What is your entry point?

E-mail: Incorporate key words or descriptions about the position/company. You want to avoid it looking like a mass message.

Cold Call: This method works well when you notice an employer is hiring multiple positions. Introduce yourself and talk about how your program can support the labour force they will require.

Networking Events: Face-to-face interactions build the foundation for an authentic relationship.

Drop in: Great option when recruiting for a hiring event. Target employers that have recruitment needs that align with the timing of your event.

Establishing A Relationship Past The First Meeting

Taking the lead to create invested employer partnerships



STRATEGIC PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

What is an employers role in the community? Can you consider them a strategic partner; a partner that will do their share to ensure communities thrive?

Businesses have a role to play in enhancing the economic and social well being for residents. Employer engagement can provide employers avenues to build investment in the communities they do business in.

There are a variety of ways in which an employer can invest in their community. Employer engagement is one way to direct that investment into the job seekers you are working with.

If that level of investment is not organic to the employer, then you have to take the lead to spark it. Employer engagement starts with getting the company engaged with you so you can build that connection to your job seekers.

STAY IN THE LOOP WITH THE EMPLOYER

Ideas to consider:

- ✔ Join a mass list that employers email out identifying open positions they are looking to fill.
- ✔ Subscribe to the companies newsletter or access their quarterly reports.

Although you are not directly engaging with the company contact, you are staying informed on their recruitment needs.

Employers are people.
You are building a relationship with a person, not a business.
Create investment through meaningful communication to engage employers outside the topic of hiring.

SHARE INFORMATION THAT MAKES SENSE

Ideas to consider:

- ✔ Community investment opportunities. For example, invite employers to participate in an event your organization is hosting.
- ✔ External options such as grants for employee upskilling.
- ✔ Share internal information about your organizations events and participants through emails or e-newsletters.



How Dynamic Are You?

In order to cultivate long term relationships you need to be dynamic in your approach and not operate as a one size fits all.

Employers, job seekers and your organization are all key stakeholders. Understanding the needs of each party will determine the services and supports provided.

Coming To The Table With Confidence

Coming to the table with confidence is setting the stage for expectations on what your organization needs from the relationship.

Your primary motivation should not be exclusive to employer needs.

Acknowledging you are on an equal playing field with the employer, so there is not a perceived hierarchy in the relationship.

Not every partnership makes sense.

The relationship should not compromise the integrity of your organizations missions and values. Also, fair and equitable treatment of your job seekers must be maintained.

Providing solutions to meet a shared goal.

If an employer is agreeing to partner with you, they are agreeing to hire from the pool of job seekers you work with.

Pushing beyond status quo.

Red flags do not mean you need to walk away from an employer.

How do you navigate conversations that challenge recruitment practices, employee retention strategies, or perceived stereotypes?

Unique Employer Partnerships

Tangible takeaways for mutually beneficial services and supports to employers

1. Identify your services and supports

Meeting recruitment needs for an employer can fall along a spectrum of services. This can include large multi-employer recruitment fairs or working directly with one employer providing referrals or hosting large hiring events.

2. Put systems in place during the recruitment and follow-up process to preserve the employer relationship regardless of the referral outcome

Recruitment Process: Create your own questions to pre-screen job seekers. Responses to these questions can help you gauge suitability for the position and may even showcase roadblocks such as unreliable contact information or weak interview responses.

Recruitment Process: Set-up different processes for staff to follow depending on the circumstance of the referral. For example, have staff email a recommendation along with a resume when referring a client.

Post-Employment Follow-up: Check-in with both the employer and job seeker after your client has started to see how things are working out. Do this early into the placement so you can address any issues right away.

Examining Your Own Practices

After reviewing the takeaways listed to the right, examine your own employer services and supports.

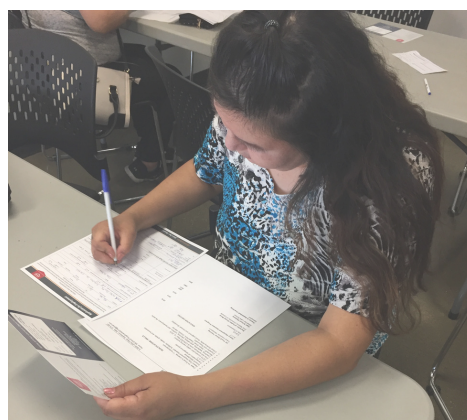
1. Create a detailed list of all the services and supports that you offer an employer.
2. For each service and support identified, describe the recruitment and follow-up systems that are put in place to ensure a good referral.
3. How dynamic are you? Are you able to list the ways you make adjustments to employer services based on each stakeholder's needs?
4. What are your best practices? Outline standard guidelines to follow, regardless of the employer partnership.
5. Determine next steps. How can you strengthen existing practices to create more success in connecting your job seekers to jobs?

3. Same tool used differently

Be dynamic in tailoring your employer events. Organizing a job fair? Bring employers to the table who do not use large scale events as a form of recruitment. Hosting an individual hiring event? Consider holding preliminary interviews for the employer or allowing access to computers to complete online applications.

4. General guidelines to follow

- The staff member who manages your employer engagement should be the main point of contact with employers. Consistency is key in building and maintaining relationships.
- Before you send a resume to an employer, always gain permission from your client. You may think they are a good fit for the position but that does not mean that the client feels the same way.
- Being transparent with employer contacts builds trust in the relationship. This is also a chance to advocate for a client who may not meet qualifications for a position but you can state your case of why you feel they would still be successful in that role.





QUINT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

101-1120 20th Street West
Saskatoon, SK S7M 0Y8

info@quintsaskatoon.ca
306.978.4041

www.quintsaskatoon.ca



@quintsaskatoon



@QuintSaskatoon



@quintsaskatoon