**Emerging Practice**

**Title: Employer Disability Resource Network -- Iowa**

**Highlights:**

1. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services facilitates a multi-agency collaboration designed to support Iowa Businesses in including individuals with disabilities as employees.
2. This collaboration makes their combined expertise available to businesses as needed to support them with successful employment of individuals with disabilities and with the promotion of available positions to qualified individuals with disabilities.

**Description:**

The Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services agency assumed a leadership role, collaborative business engagement and service during the WIA era, and the partnership continues through the Employer Disability Resource Network: <http://www.edrnetwork.org/>.

The core group of agency representatives meet once a month. There are multiple agencies that participate. Currently, six of them attend regularly. The mission of this group is to be a premier partner with businesses and serve them with one voice. Participating agencies include state level contacts with the state’s two VR agencies, and the workforce agency. Also participating are representatives from Veterans services, Community Rehabilitation Programs, an American Job Center representative, the Small Business Administration, and a project with the State’s Developmental Disability Council.

Examples of recent projects by this group include the following:

1. Reverse Job Fair: With an accompanying “boot camp” for participating job candidates to support them in preparation. The first 24 candidates who engaged in this strategy received 10 job offers; six were accepted.
2. Diversity Summit: Attended by 30 business partners and included presentations.

* Accommodations in the workplace
* Life cycle of employment: Application to retirement
* Generated feedback from business participants to determine interest in future summits and additional resources through EDRN

1. “Job analysis” for positions with business partners and sharing with Network partners.

This group is using these activities to explore additional strategies to the traditional labor exchange system to meet objectives for job seeker in competitive integrated employment (CIE), such as customized employment. This occurs through consultation and exploration with business partners.

These ideas are currently in development by the Network:

1. Increasing opportunities for sensitivity training with business management
2. Next Business Summit: Someone from a business that employs a blind individual talks about their experience with other businesses. This can develop into similar sharing opportunities with regard to other types of disabilities.
3. Growing the EDRN activity to be more localized in other parts of the state. Recent activities have been strongly localized in central Iowa through strong state level partnership (close to the capital).
   1. They are currently supporting the development of similar efforts by partners in two other communities in the state to replicate the partnership and similar types of activities. In developing these partnerships, it is stressed that each member must commit to working together and share resources and expertise in responding to business needs. This requires trust and openness as a requirement for participation.
   2. EDRN, through Michelle Krefft, will be participating in Iowa’s Employment First efforts for 2017, focused on the South Central Behavior Health Region. This is an opportunity to expand the EDRN business engagement concept at a regional level. Michelle will be providing technical assistance to the Region and will be able to integrate the EDRN team and principles as a part of the activity.

**Evaluation and Potential Impact:**

This practice is an example of how the Rehabilitation Agency, as a Core Service Partner for the State’s Employment System, can assume a leadership role among the WIOA Core and Required Partners, to meet the business community’s needs with regard to fully engaging talents and skills among qualified individuals with disabilities.

**For More Information:**

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