**Emerging Practice**

**Date: 8/9/17**

**Title: Missouri Collaborative Business Engagement**

**Highlights:**

1. The State of Missouri maintains a committee to the State Board that focuses on Business Services. This committee is currently chaired by one of the Core Partners, Vocational Rehabilitation, and one of its activities is the facilitation of an annual meeting to bring all partner together to focus on business services.
2. Many Regions in the State maintain committees to the Local WDB that focus on disability and employment. Partners have begun a structure for collaborative focus on business service and employment for qualified individuals with disabilities called “NEXUS.”
3. Workforce Agencies and Vocational Rehabilitation in Missouri have been working together to host business events and to survey business satisfaction and service needs.

**Description:**

State Business Committee

In Missouri, the State Board has established a Business Service Committee, where the collaborative focus is to add value to business in working with the AJC network. This committee is currently chaired by one of the Core Partners, Missouri’s Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. One of the committee’s activities has been to host a fall business summit every year. This year’s event will be the third the committee will convene. The first event was held in 2015. American Job Center partner agencies from all regions in the state attend these events.

During the first year, the participants attended as teams from each of their regions. They had an opportunity to spend a portion of the meeting discussing shared information with others from their region, so they could implement strategies together when they returned to their area of the state. The second year featured “hot” topics, such as business sector strategies and apprenticeships. Each region presented information to the rest of the attendees about how they were addressing these topics. Each presentation included a focus on how the local partner agencies are working together. The focus of the third (current) year will be to add how “ex-offenders” are included in AJC services, with additional emphasis on state and local resources and important strategies that are good for all partners to be aware. This summit will feature a panel that will include an ex-offender, service team, and employer. This event will have employers present as vendors for the summit.

After finishing the fall summit this year, the business engagement group will channel their energy to facilitate employer focus groups for feedback on service satisfaction as well as skill and employment needs.

**Yvonne Wright with the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency reports on the vision of these meetings for business service operation. All business service representatives have the expectation to make the expertise of each of their partner agencies available to the business customer as needed, as a part of the same service. This is provided by a connection that is as immediate as possible, without the sense of being a “referral” to another agency.**

Local Collaborative Committees Focused on Disability and Employment

In Missouri, a lot of the Workforce Boards have established standing committees addressing disability and employment. They have been hosting events with employers specifically to support greater employment of people with disabilities. Boards have asked for leadership on these teams from the local VR representative. A lot of these events feature employer panels, and they developed these events collaboratively with the other partner agencies.

There was an original employer event in St. Louis, which has been emulated since in other regions. It was developed collaboratively with the Job Center partners, with a focus on establishing a business event that would result in increasing successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The partners included the disability community in the development of this event. A common emphasis in all of these events are to engage area businesses and focus on two things:

1. Learn more about business needs through direct engagement at the event, and
2. Increase opportunities for employment outcomes for qualified individuals with disabilities within the regional business sector groups.

This year, there will be seven of those events within the state’s 14 Workforce Regions. This has spread through the activity of the state-level staff who were involved with the St. Louis event.

Missouri believes that it will be hosting the largest “Reverse Job Fair” in the nation this year. Information on this event can be found in the two-part videos below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFNS9udTp9I>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZD0ALRNJBU>

Another development of the local collaboration effort in Missouri Regions is the establishment of “NEXUS” groups as an employment collaborative. These groups are being developed and grown locally. The focus of NEXUS is to talk to business with one voice as a system. They take on the responsibility of sharing business information across the system and to increase the business satisfaction through the collaboration to assure that the business needs are met.

Each local “NEXUS” is unique. The focus for all is to “give AND get.” The Kansas City “NEXUS” is a good example of how this works. Meetings include businesses, but are attended mostly by partners -- core and others. A representative from KC business leadership network also attends. For a while (until travel restrictions no local permitted his participation), a monitor for OFCCP attended. He would refer businesses to the NEXUS group to assure the outreach to qualified individuals with disabilities. CERNER (one of the larger KC employers) invited NEXUS to hold meetings at their location, and during another business event, another employer provided a person to do mock interviews. This activity led to some individuals leaving the event with new jobs.

The NEXUS efforts in regions began with a focus on disability and employment, but have grown into a collaborative business service model and practice that is now much broader.

Collaborative Efforts between the Workforce State Agency and Vocational Rehabilitation

On the State level, Yvonne Wright has operated within the VR agency as the Director of Workforce Services and Business Outreach. In seeking to work with the state’s workforce agency to increase the ability of the system to respond to business customers with one voice, she developed a partnership the Danielle Smith, Missouri’s Workforce EO officer, and together they developed guidance and support to the AJC’s management and staff across the state, with regard to program access. The vision is to assure that Missouri’s Career Pathway Models, as they are developed, will be fully inclusive of all job seekers in a region through the support with Section 188 and Program Access. Together, they have developed and provided training and resources and developed a strategy to sustain this support.

These agencies have been collaborating on the development of an Employer Satisfaction Survey (stemmed out of discussion on Common Performance Measure 6). Workforce and VR developed a survey that they made available through the “gold version” of Survey Monkey -- developed the survey specific to satisfaction of the business as a result of AJC services and not unique to the agency that served them. Each partner agency can secure the employer responses to look at their separate services, but the expectation is that they all compile the responses to generate a system response.

**Evaluation and Potential Impact:**

A hallmark of the activities described above is that they are locally developed collaboratively with the Workforce Development Boards and partnerships. It is necessary to remain unique by region in terms of design in order to be responsive to the business sectors that are unique to each region. It is worth noting though, how practices that prove useful in one region are quickly replicated in others through the collaborative support by the Core Partner agencies at the state level.

As we’ve heard the concerns from the business sector regarding being able to work with the workforce system as a single system, it is reasonable to expect that the practices described in this document will demonstrate an increasing impact on the business community in terms of business satisfaction. As businesses grow as a result of impact, each region should be reporting increased business services for existing customers as well as new customers.

**For More Information:**

Yvonne Wright, Director of Workforce Development

and Business Outreach

Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation

Yvonne.wright@vr.dese.mo.gov