

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
DISABILITIES COMMITTEE – Sub Committee Meeting  
Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, CHAIRWOMAN  
MINUTES: May 10, 2023 10:00AM via Zoom

**Committee Members**

1. Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, Inroads for Opportunities
2. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
3. Manny Ramirez, Union County ADA Compliance
4. Marc Schweitzer, NJDVRS Business Outreach Team
5. Melissa Lomax, Family Resource Network

**Union County Workforce Development Staff**

Meredith Barracato, Policy and Strategic Planning Advisor

**Meeting Summary**

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chairwoman Cindy Walsh Rintzler expresses gratitude to everyone present at the meeting and acknowledges the hard work of the larger disability committee for the Union County Workforce Development Board. She highlights their efforts in creating a strategic plan that aligns with state guidelines and addresses the needs of the communities in Union County. Cindy believes that the strategic plan will greatly contribute to the committee's success in serving the community effectively. She thanks everyone for their time and anticipates positive outcomes from the meeting. Everyone was asked to introduce themselves.

**Employer Engagement Discussion**

Meredith Barracato informs the committee members that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the strategies developed over the past two years. The focus of the meeting is to generate specific action steps for the group to implement in the future. Meredith emphasizes the importance of finding a tangible strategy that can be effectively implemented. She hopes that the meeting will not take up too much time as it serves as an introductory session to explore feasible strategies for moving forward.

Meredith Barracato informs the attendees that the strategic plan has been published, with a specific section dedicated to employer engagement. She directs everyone to page 133 of the plan for reference and provides a link for accessibility. Based on previous committee discussions and feedback, six pressing issues regarding employer engagement have been identified. To address these issues effectively, the Chairwoman suggested having breakout meetings to focus on each specific item. Meredith proposed prioritizing these issues and determining the necessary steps and deadlines for accomplishing

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them. Meredith encourages the committee members to share their thoughts, experiences, and feedback on the priorities and opens the floor for discussion.

Marc Schweitzer asked if the committee was looking into solicitation and cold canvassing to engage employers or is the committee hoping that employers have an interest in hiring people with disabilities and reach out? Carolina Marin mentioned that the American Job Center is trying to come up with a strategy and speaking to the employers to kind of get a better idea of who they're like how many people they're going to hire, just so it makes sense. Carolina mentioned that they don't want employers to just come to job fair, and they're not going to hire anyone. She added that this year the American Job Center will host another job fair for individuals with Disabilities but they will have new strategies to better serve the employers and the population as well. Carolina suggested organizing workshops before the event to prepare attendees. They propose conducting workshops on resume building and interview coaching, focusing on providing valuable skills to the participants. The speaker recommends targeting smaller groups to ensure a more focused and personalized approach to address the needs of the attendees effectively. Marc suggested that the employer lists what the responsibilities are such as to upload the resume, what they require to get into their system.

Melissa Lomax focused on the importance of employer training and suggested providing a resource pack for employers. She highlights the value of including information sheets and resources like the Job Accommodation Network to support employers in understanding and implementing reasonable accommodations. Melissa believes that hosting educational sessions specifically for employers would be highly beneficial and can help dispel misconceptions surrounding hiring individuals with disabilities. She shares her personal experience of presenting to employers and addressing their questions about hiring people with disabilities and contributing to their organizations. Melissa emphasizes the need for general concepts and knowledge to empower employers to approach job fairs and hiring individuals with disabilities with confidence and understanding. She underscores the positive impact that hiring individuals with disabilities can have on businesses, both in terms of contributions and increased revenue. Melissa suggests that employers should be aware of these benefits and

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quotes that reinforce the importance of supporting and understanding the disabled community.

Manny Ramirez and Melissa Lomax discussed the importance of understanding each employer's specific needs and knowledge level before providing appropriate training. They agree that conducting a survey beforehand would help gather information about employers' existing knowledge and tailor the training accordingly. Melissa suggests including an infographic or a brief write-up about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities along with the survey. They believe that such an approach would encourage more employers to participate in the survey and perceive it as a valuable opportunity for their organization. The goal is to make employers feel confident and motivated to fill out the survey, recognizing the benefits and positive impact of hiring individuals with disabilities.

Chairwoman Walsh Rintzler mentioned the focus is on crafting the wording of the survey to convey a sense of openness and the intention to assist employers. Emphasizing the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and highlighting the current demand for staff, the aim is to motivate employers to see the value in filling out the survey. The population of individuals with disabilities is viewed as potentially highly beneficial to companies, and the objective is to communicate this effectively to encourage survey participation.

Carolina Marin and Marc Schweitzer both expressed their concerns over the low responses they have seen when issuing surveys for the American Job Center and DVRS respectfully. Carolina explained the process she uses when she sends out surveys. Melissa Lomax asked if there were incentives that can be given out even if it is an employer spot light that will show the employer is working with the disability community. Meredith Barracato mentioned she will speak to the Workforce Development Board Director, Antonio Rivera, about an employer spot light and see if the Commissioner Sergio Granados would participate. Meredith mentioned Commissioner Granados was the driving force behind the inclusive hiring event last year.

All committee members agreed the following strategy will be the focus of the subcommittee;

- Introduce Employer interest/info seeking Survey- What is your experience, concerns, and interest in? What information would help you?

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Carolina Marin informs the group that she is currently working on building new connections and improving the employer database. She is organizing the database by industry and has created a Google tracking sheet to track and categorize different employers. She mentions that she plans to create a specific section for employers who are interested in hiring individuals with disabilities, alongside existing sections for other hiring preferences. Her efforts are focused on expanding the network of potential employers and ensuring better targeting for outreach and engagement.

The Chairwoman addressed the importance of considering job coaches and their accommodation in the employment process for individuals with disabilities. She mentioned that not all employers can accommodate job coaches due to various reasons, such as restrictions at certain job locations like airports. The Chairwoman suggested creating a list of "job coach-friendly" employers who are open and able to accommodate job coaches. She clarified that employers may not refuse job coaches due to unwillingness but rather because it may be unrealistic or unfeasible to have a job coach on-site. Additionally, she suggested breaking down the list to include information on enclave work, where individuals with significant cognitive impairments work in small groups with staff members. The Chairwoman points out that some places are more conducive to enclave work, like shops, while smaller businesses may face limitations. Having such guidelines and information would be helpful for individuals and organizations aiming to employ individuals with disabilities, allowing them to have a better understanding of the available options and considerations when seeking job opportunities.

Manny Ramirez discuss the potential inclusion of employers' openness to accommodating individuals with guide dogs in their facilities. Melissa Lomax acknowledge that this topic could be risky to address in a separate grouping, as it may inadvertently expose employers to legal implications if they deny accommodation. Melissa expressed the need to protect employers who may be unaware of the laws surrounding guide dog accommodation. Melissa suggests having a separate discussion with these employers to ensure they are properly informed about the legal requirements. Melissa mentioned that it is crucial to avoid creating a separate listing that could potentially lead to litigation or negative consequences for employers who are simply responding based on their current understanding. Manny agrees that employers may not necessarily see their response as a denial but rather as their best answer based on their current understanding. He mentions that his role involves educating employers and helping them put themselves in the shoes of individuals with disabilities. Manny supports Melissa's suggestion of education and proposes a

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plan of action where employers are educated after the survey process. Once employers are better informed and have a deeper understanding, the focus can shift towards the hiring process.

Committee members agreed having a frequently asked questions section on various websites would be beneficial to educate employers on how to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Melissa suggested having recorded informational sessions that employers can review in the future.

Marc shared his experience as the former chair of the Middlesex County Abilities Committee and a board member of the Middlesex County Workforce Development Board. Marc mentioned his last contribution was organizing a webinar for Autism Awareness Month. He reached out to contacts from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to provide information on autism. The webinar featured speakers such as an entrepreneur from Secaucus who runs Spectrum Works and has connections in the fashion industry. Dr. Helen Genova discussed interviewing techniques, Jason Wepman focused on disclosure and job preparedness, James Merrimantano shared about the SCALE program at Rutgers, which provides community supports for individuals on the autism spectrum, and Lewis Hoffman from NJ TIP at Rutgers talked about travel training. The webinar was well received, and Marc expects it to be available on the website for viewing.

Melissa suggested that one of the initial steps is to determine what aspects the committee considers important for employers to reflect on and share. She emphasizes the need for these important aspects to be areas where the committee can provide answers and assistance through FAQs and training. Melissa proposes taking stock of committee member's knowledge and resources in these areas, such as universal design and accessibility, to ensure that committee members can effectively address and provide support in those areas. The focus is on identifying the key topics where committee members can provide valuable information and assistance to employers.

Committee Members agreed to share employer surveys they will research. Surveys will be sent to Meredith and she will upload to a Google Drive folder. Committee members agreed to meet once a month to discuss the action steps needed in rolling out a survey.

The Chairwoman notes that July is Disability Pride Month and suggests having something ready to roll out on social media platforms. She mentions that every town likely has a human relations commission or abilities committee where the

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survey or FAQ could be shared to raise awareness. She proposes meeting in June to discuss and prepare the materials, aiming to have them ready for release by the end of July. The Chairwoman acknowledges that it may take two meetings to wrap up all the necessary tasks, with the second meeting scheduled for the second week of July to ensure the survey is released on time. Meredith Barracato will email everyone a date for the next meeting in June.

**Committee Adjournment**