

WORKFORCE INTERMEDIARIES: STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES



Over the last two decades, landmark legislation, successful initiatives and technological advances have helped improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Although significant strides have been made, much work remains to be done. People with disabilities continue to experience low employment rates and often have limited opportunities for career growth. At the same time, employers across the country report a lack of skilled workers to meet their workforce needs.

Workforce intermediaries are in a unique position to address these challenges and may be particularly critical in supporting youth with disabilities and the employers who stand to benefit from their skills and talents. Workforce intermediaries are organizations that proactively address workforce needs using a dual customer approach—one which considers the needs of both employees and employers. Examples of organizations that can function as workforce intermediaries include faith-based and community organizations, employer organizations, community colleges, temporary staffing agencies, workforce investment boards and labor organizations.

Regardless of the type of organization, workforce intermediaries implement a range of strategies designed to bolster the local, regional and national workforce as well as economic development. In addition to helping job seekers find jobs and employers find workers, workforce intermediaries address communities' long-term workforce needs, such as training, education and employment support services. Workforce intermediaries may:

- Convene employers to discuss local workforce needs and trends
- Broker and provide workforce development services
- Improve education, training and employment support services for job seekers
- Conduct research into local workforce needs and trends
- Promote skill standards and career paths that match local employers' needs
- Influence wages and benefits
- Help improve and govern the workforce development system

- Assemble multiple partners and funding streams around common goals
- Bring together businesses, faith-based and community organizations, educational institutions, labor unions, social service agencies and other providers to implement programs and policies to improve labor market outcomes
- Reduce employee turnover
- Increase economic mobility for workers
- Achieve results with innovative approaches and solutions to workforce problems
- Improve outcomes for employers and their workers by improving public systems and employment practices

According to the American Assembly, a national public affairs forum, workforce intermediaries generally have three key goals:

- **To bring workers into the American mainstream.** Success for workforce intermediaries means more workers employed in jobs that offer the promise of financial stability.
- **To increase efficiency and productivity in the workplace.** Workforce intermediaries are equally concerned with serving employers' needs, recognizing that employer and worker success are interdependent.
- **To enhance regional competitiveness.** Workforce intermediaries understand that the health of regional economies affects the ability to advance workers and strengthen businesses.

■ BENEFITS OF INTERMEDIARIES

Job seekers with disabilities benefit from workforce intermediaries through:

- Skills training relevant to their particular labor market
- Workplace-based training
- Access to employment support services such as child care, transportation and housing

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- Increased likelihood of achieving financial stability
- Access to career and life planning workshops
- Higher rates of advancement into positions with higher wages and benefits

Employers benefit from workforce intermediaries through:

- Access to new sources of pre-screened skilled job applicants
- Reduced recruitment costs
- Higher retention rates compared to traditional hires
- Increased productivity
- Tax credit information

■ YOUTH-ORIENTED INTERMEDIARIES

Research indicates that to succeed in life and work, all youth, including youth with disabilities, need to develop competence and confidence and obtain real-world experience. Therefore, some intermediary organizations focus, or have particular programs that focus, on the needs of youth. By connecting schools and youth organizations with employers, these intermediaries leverage resources to help ensure youth gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workforce or higher education.

Youth with disabilities benefit from youth-oriented workforce intermediaries through:

- Information about job openings and career options
- Hands-on exposure to the world of work through paid and unpaid internships and work experience
- Access to outcome-based education and jobs skills training
- Opportunities to develop social, civic and leadership skills
- Improved prospects for career advancement
- Development of a support network that can assist in finding and keeping a job
- Knowledge and understanding of disability issues and rights, including disclosure and privacy policies and accommodations

Employers benefit from youth-oriented workforce intermediaries through:

- Awareness of recruitment resources
- Opportunity to positively shape the workforce of tomorrow
- Applicant screening
- Applicants with technical skills
- On the job support for youth with disabilities
- Return on investment of time and resources

■ RESOURCES

The following list includes examples of resources that provide further information for individuals with disabilities and employers who wish to learn more about intermediaries. This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

- **Workforce Intermediaries in the 21st Century:** Information on promoting the efforts of workforce intermediaries—www.opportunitiesatwork.org/home.htm
- **The Intermediary Network:** A national association of educational and workforce development organizations working in local communities to ensure the success of youth—www.intermediarynetwork.org
- **The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth:** Information about employment and youth with disabilities—www.ncwd-youth.info

The listing of the above resources in this fact sheet should not be construed as an endorsement of these entities, their services or products by the Office of Disability Employment Policy or the U.S. Department of Labor.

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