



Employer Engagement



One of twelve training packets created for Texas Workforce Board regions as part of the Texas Workforce Commission Youth Program Initiative.

1. Powerful Partnerships
2. Getting Your Youth Advisory Group From Here to There
3. You and Youth in the Middle: Effective Case Management
4. Employer Engagement
5. Youth at Work: Making the Most of Work-Based Learning
6. Youth Investment in Rural Areas
7. Windows on the Workplace: Mentoring, Youth, and WIA
8. Community Resource Mapping: Knowing Your Youth Services Landscape
9. Letting Numbers Guide: Labor Market Information and Youth Services
10. Engaging Out-of-School Youth
11. Building Your Year-Round Youth System
12. Evaluate It!: From Policy to Practice to Performance

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Produced by School & Main Institute, Boston, MA
Design by Soul Food Design, Cambridge, MA

Employer Engagement

TRAINING GOALS

- Understand what employers want or need from their involvement in youth and workforce development.
- Learn how to get employers interested and engaged in your effort.
- Evaluate and enhance your current employer participation methods.

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Why Youth Need Employers

Youth need employers! With them solidly in the picture, WIA services take on powerful relevance and authenticity. Without them, youth get fleeting glimpses of the workplace environment and make major life decisions – everything from dropping out to college selection – without a full set of tools and information. It's like trying to fly with only one wing.

Instead, youth need multiple opportunities to connect with employers and workplaces as they progress from the middle school years through their 20's.

Youth need employers to provide:

- Firsthand exposure to major industry and career clusters
- An understanding of the culture and demands of the workplace
- Places, projects, people and situations that help them develop and hone critical skills – academic, basic employability, and more advanced occupational skills
- Professional role models
- Work experience
- Paid employment

Multiple opportunities mean many employers. This packet will help you look at what employers want and need in order to participate in youth services and how you can effectively recruit and sustain their involvement.



Why Employers Get Involved with Youth Programs

How does their agenda fit your youth agenda?

Everybody wants employers, particularly private sector employers, at their table. What motivates an employer to get involved with youth programs? People have asked that question many times over, especially over the past ten years. Employers themselves give three types of reasons:

Philanthropic – Good Corporate Citizen

- Do something for our community and kids
- Part of corporate mission

Immediate Interests Met

- Inexpensive part-time or entry-level help
- Good public relations
- Increased workforce diversity
- Improved employee morale and supervisory skill
- Reduced recruitment costs; dependable recruitment pipeline

Common Good – Better Workforce over the Long Term

- Higher-skilled workers
- Economic development

On one hand you might think, well, of course, who wouldn't want to work with youth? Surely every employer who does, benefits.

However, there is a flip side. Employers have also provided legitimate reasons why they hesitate to work with youth.

- Working with youth can be expensive or time-consuming
- They can't do the work you need done; too little experience or skill
- They compete with adult workers for jobs
- They don't stay on at my company even after we train them
- They require too much supervision
- Their schedules can be too hard to manage

Understanding both perspectives will help you better navigate your own employer community. You'll go in clear-eyed and ready to talk with employers about how their agenda fits your youth agenda.

What Employers Say They Want from a Workforce System

Employers at both the national and local level have been very articulate about what they want from a workforce system.¹ As you read this list of general expectations, keep an eye on where these needs overlap with how you operate youth services.

SKILLED EMPLOYEES

Many employers report that employees still lack basic employability skills (punctuality, personal management) and are seriously deficient in math and written and oral communication skills. They want better preparation, especially for entry-level positions.

PIPELINES FOR QUALIFIED APPLICANTS

Any employer will tell you that hiring is a time-consuming, expensive, and uncertain proposition. Finding qualified people is a never-ending challenge. Employers want services that include application screening and employability training.

SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT

Both job seekers and employers want a customer service representative who can help them efficiently access workforce services.

LOCALIZED SERVICES

Employers want workforce services to be accessible locally, and responsive to local employment conditions and employer needs.

INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES

One size doesn't fit all, and employers want workforce services to reflect their industry, needs, schedules, etc.

TIMELINESS OF SERVICES

Employers want calls returned, responses given – all on the “same day/next day” timeline expected in a business setting.

REDUCED PAPERWORK

Streamlining paperwork is good, eliminating it, even better. Employers report they would rather pay a private employment service to avoid paperwork than deal with the administrative load of “free” public services.

GOOD MARKETING OF SERVICES

Employers want clear information from the workforce system on the quality, responsiveness, convenience, and accessibility of services – in other words, solid marketing that can counter negative perceptions of public services.

ACCOUNTABILITY & QUALITY MANAGEMENT

It's a mantra to employers: quality, high standards, and tangible results. So, it's no surprise they expect those same elements in their workforce system. From job seeker up through board level management, everyone should have a clear role, targets to shoot for, and results to report back.

¹ [Reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act: What Employers Say About Workforce Development](#). Washington, DC: Workforce Innovation Networks (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers/Jobs for the Future), 2003.

Relationships, Relationships

Talk about - and manage - the differences.

When employers and youth service organizations work together, amazing things can happen. Staff on both sides feel connected, vital, giving, proud – and many other equally powerful emotions. The relationship isn't always trouble-free, however. Like any relationship, there tend to be dynamics that create consternation, whether you recognize them fully at the time or not.

When employers and youth organizations work together, watch for differences in four areas in particular:

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Mission, values, and daily priorities differ across partner organizations. A business cares about the services or products it provides and its bottom line. If it doesn't, it won't survive. An employer's mission and major focus is rarely youth. A youth organization's mission is unequivocally youth.

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

Budget cycles and planning cycles, fiscal years, how authorization or permission is given, roles and responsibilities – all affect day-to-day activity enormously. A few key insights into the inner workings of a partner organization can greatly advance your relationship.

COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

In a world of cell phones, email, instant messaging, there are still major differences in how and when people in different organizations communicate. Youth workers, teachers, and others working with youth often spend their days in classes and sessions where phones are an unwanted interruption (or they simply don't have a phone or computer nearby). To employers, accustomed to return phone calls or emails within hours, they might seem hard to get hold of.

SCHEDULING TIME

Business hours, summer and vacation schedules, the pace and structure of a work day, good meeting times, student schedules and transportation – one of the easiest things you can do is make the best use of people's time by clearly communicating about calendar years, weekly schedules, and meeting, call, and other scheduling preferences.

Resist the temptation to pass judgment on the differences between you. Differences just are. It's how you manage them that make them "good" or "bad." In the end, it's often the differences that push the relationship to work better for youth.



Five Steps for Engaging Employers

You've probably asked someone to do something for you many times. Recruiting employers for your effort is no different in most ways. You have to ask and you have to know what you want them to do. However, you want employers to stay involved – do something more than once – and that does mean you need to think more strategically.

HERE ARE FIVE STEPS YOU CAN USE TO HELP YOU DEVELOP DEEPER AND LONGER TERM EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION:

- Step One:** Identify employer interests and payoff
- Step Two:** Be ready for yes. Articulate an employer participation menu.
- Step Three:** Identify an employer-friendly message and messengers.
- Step Four:** Provide proactive, professional support
- Step Five:** Solicit and listen to employer feedback
Re-engage Mentors

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY INTERESTS AND PAYOFF

Even employers who participate in youth programs out of philanthropic commitment want to see a return on the time and resources they invest. Your first step is to understand what some of those short and longer-term returns – or payoffs – might be.

Your goal is to align:

Interest
:
Payoff (Results)
:
Program Design

The words “interests” and “payoff” can sound heartless. In fact, they are just the opposite. If you know what your employers care about and you respond concretely, with results that mean something to them, they will remain involved.

Will you be able to respond to every interest, all the time? No, most employers don't expect it. They are thrilled, however, when you ask questions like:

- What do you need to see to make your participation worthwhile?
- What does your company or business need that we might be able to help you with?
- What would make this work for you personally or professionally?
- Do you have any hesitations? Any concerns about getting involved?

You then translate those raw interests into tangible actions you can take to deliver actual payoff.

Example

An employer tells you that she participates in your effort so that the community knows more about her business and what it offers.

Interests

Community relations, marketing

Possible payoff for the employer

Mention in your newsletter or web site, with business logo
 Newspaper article, editorial piece, or ad thanking partners
 Mention and thank you at a local Chamber meeting
 Mention at a high profile program or community event
 Invitation to a networking lunch or meeting with community leaders

take action! interests & payoff

Identify formal methods you can use to identify interests employers have – a question you ask potential employer partners in a call or on sign-up form or profile, etc. Score a win early in the relationship! What could you do to meet at least one short-term interest?

Here are several ways you can explore the interests of employers in your area:

- Conduct a focus group.
- Use a survey to sample a good cross section of employer types.
- Interview a selection of employers by phone.
- Attend networking events where business people are present. Listen to and ask about workforce needs, community relations strategies, and other interests.
- Speak to all potential and new employer partners about their interests. Include a question on a partner profile, participation survey, or interest form, if you use them.

Repeat the interest conversation regularly. The question, “Have we met partner interests?” should become part of how you evaluate overall program performance.

STEP TWO: BE PREPARED FOR YES. ARTICULATE A PARTICIPATION MENU

You often see a funny little pattern in employer recruitment: a job recruiter or program coordinator calls or meets with an employer about their youth initiative. The meeting is friendly, the youth organization representative chatty and inspiring. The employer hears about the cause, the mission. Ideally, the discussion covers the employer’s interests and the benefits of participation.

Then, the moment comes: the employer says, “Yes, sure, I’m interested.”

At that moment, an important matching process begins, but many people aren’t ready for it. What’s the match? You want to match that employer’s interests with the right level and type of involvement.

An employer looking for a small dose of good community relations will plug into your effort differently than an employer with serious entry-level recruitment costs and needs.

- Interests
- :
- Investment Level
- :
- Participation Options
- :
- Payoff (Results)
- :
- Program Design

“Yes” opens the possibility for a new relationship, not just with the person but also with the organization. In order to manage the match and the relationship as it builds, you need to articulate a clear set of participation options.

In the 1990’s, a coalition of CEO’s and youth advocates called the National Employer Leadership Council developed the Employer Participation Model – a list of 56 roles employers could play in three major areas of youth, education, and workforce preparation.²



While the NELC no longer exists as a formal entity, the ideas and lessons of the Employer Participation Model survive and are well worth incorporating into your approach.

**take action!
be prepared for
yes**

Develop a “Participation Menu” for your initiative that outlines what employers can do to help. Make sure your menu defines activities, the employer’s role, and time commitment. Test your menu on an employer! Do they understand it? Does it answer major questions they have about involvement options?

² Employer Participation Model. Washington, DC: National Employer Leadership Council, 1996. Adapted for WIA.

The NELC model worked well because it:

- Took a menu approach and gave a range of options for different youth age ranges and levels of employer interest.
- Clarified “age and stage” appropriate activities – career development activities that make sense for younger and older, less or more skilled youth.
- Looked at ways employers could work with other organizations and internally to be youth-friendly.
- Used straightforward, consistent language and layman’s terms to describe activities.
- Specified the time commitment involved.

An employer interested in helping one youth and an employer with broader interests, needs or a desire to make large-scale impact could both see themselves in the model. You also need to articulate a clear set of participation options for employers. Review the programmatic needs you have for youth and the services you provide. What “positions” can employers hold in your effort? What are the expectations and time commitments associated with each?

Finally, as a check, do the roles you have available match the different levels of interest employers have? Not all employers can provide jobs or internships, especially if they’ve just met you. How else might they help? The relationship you start may grow into a deeper level of involvement over time.

The following page gives an example of a participation menu, based on the NELC approach, and adapted for WIA programs.

PARTICIPATION MENU - EXAMPLES	AGES	LENGTH OF ACTIVITY	EMPLOYEE TO YOUTH RATIO
WORKING DIRECTLY WITH YOUTH & YOUTH SERVICE STAFF			
Career Awareness			
• Career Talks: Visit young people in their program or school and explain your work, company or industry.	5-21	1-2 hours	1:25
• Workplace and Industry Tours: Let youth tour your work site, talk with employees and observe workplace activities.	5-21	1-2 hours	1:10 or 25
• Lessons/Learning Activities: Help a class, after-school program, or small group of young people work on a short-term activity or project related to your job or skills.	5-21	1-5 one-hour visits	1:10 or 25
• Career Days/Career Fairs: Present or staff a table at a special career event. Allow youth to meet you to learn about your company and industry.	11-21	2 hours to half day	Varies
• Tutoring: Meet with a young person to help him or her master basic or advanced skills.	5-21	2 hours a week	Varies
Career Exploration			
• Job Shadowing: Allow a young person to follow you around during your normal job activity.	11-21	Varies, 1 day to 2 weeks	1:1 to 5
• Job Rotations: Let a young people transfer among a number of positions and tasks at your worksite so they can learn about how each part of your organization contributes to products and services you provide.	14-21	Varies by program	1:1 to 5
• Entrepreneurship and Service Learning: Coach young people as they plan, develop, and operate or simulate a small business or volunteer project.	12-21	Min. 4-6 weeks	1:1 to 25
• Mentoring: Meet regularly to review and work on career-related skill needs and expose a young person to your career, life, and workplace environment.	12-21	Min. 10 months, 3-4 hours a month	1:1 to 2
Career Preparation			
• Projects: Support, coach, and teach a young person or small group as they work on a longer-term career-related learning project.	14-21	Min. 8 weeks, 1-2 hours a week	1:1 to 8
• Internships and Work Study: Provide a paid or unpaid, volunteer, school year or summer internship. Supervise specific projects or tasks, as well as mastery of targeted learning goals.	16-21	Min. 1 semester, 5-10 hours a week or full time for 4-6 weeks	1:1 to 8
• Occupational Training Program: Partner with an educational organization to deliver specialized training, usually leading to certification, which includes workplace experience.	18-21	Varies	1:1 to 25
• Youth Apprenticeship: Provide a multi-year training program that combines school and work-based learning in a specific occupational area and leads directly into a related post-secondary program, job, or registered apprenticeship program. Paid or unpaid.	16-21	Min. 1 semester, 5-10 hours a week	1:1 to 8
• Apprenticeship (Registered): Provide a structured training program registered with the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (BAT), US Dept. of Labor, or one of 27 State Apprenticeship Agencies or Councils approved by BAT.	18-21	1-6 years, defined by the program	Defined by program
BUILDING A WORKFORCE SYSTEM			
• Local Governance: Serve as a member of local youth service, workforce, business, and industry leadership organizations and actively guide youth investment strategies.		1+ years, 5-10 hours a month	
• Industry Clusters: Work within an existing industry group or association to identify work-based and other learning opportunities for youth. Advise local workforce efforts.		1+ years, 1-2 hours a month	
• Industry Skill Standards: Participate in formal efforts to develop and share information about the skills your industry requires or will require. Strengthening Internal Company Practices		1+ years	
STRENGTHENING INTERNAL COMPANY PRACTICES			
• Internal Inventory: Review your company's current involvement with youth efforts. Ensure that resources support programs that match your company's interests.		3-5 hours	
• Supervisor Preparation: Provide training to employees who will supervise or mentor youth.		2-5 hours	
• Skill Standards: Incorporate industry skill standards into company training programs and performance review practices.		10+ hours	
• Employee Involvement: Encourage employees to get involved with youth service efforts. Publicize opportunities in company communications. Recognize or reward employees who participate.		1-2 hours a month	

Adapted for WIA youth services from the NELC Employer Participation Model

STEP THREE: IDENTIFY AN EMPLOYER-FRIENDLY MESSAGE AND MESSENGERS

Now that you are comfortable with the language of interests and involvement, you can craft effective employer marketing and recruitment tools – and get them out to the right people.

THE MESSAGE

Any message, for example, a fact sheet, intended for employers should be:

- Interest/benefits-based
- Clear about options and action required
- Concise
- Free of jargon and acronyms
- Visually appealing and professional

A good test of whether you've truly distilled your employer message down to its essence is the “elevator pitch.” It's a classic and incredibly useful exercise. You have five minutes in an elevator to make your involvement pitch to an employer: what do you say?

Once you have your core message down pat, you may want to “segment your market;” that is, identify important subgroups of employers and tailor your message accordingly. For example: small businesses, places where students already hold jobs, minority-owned or operated companies, new companies, non-profits. Look for groups with similar and distinct interests to which you could appeal.

MESSENGERS AND METHODS

Many employers come to youth programs by way of personal contacts. So-and-so knows so-and-so. It's the oldest method in the book and one you can still count on. If you haven't already polled people in, or affiliated with, your organization, definitely do so. Some programs even hand out file cards to staff once or twice a year to collect employer leads. It seems an archaic

method but it often turns up the best opportunities.

You'll likely need more than personal contacts to establish relationships with employers from all industry areas, on a large scale. At some point, you will need to go “peer to peer” and use business groups or industry groups to extend your reach into the employer community. Local Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs are seasoned youth service partners in most communities and are great places to start.

Don't overlook other groups like retired executives, small business groups, women's clubs, professional networking or trade associations, labor organizations, and others. And, be sure to take your message to other places employers gather: golf courses, community events, recreational sports leagues, job fairs, or a favorite lunch hangout.

Finally, there is the phone book, a gold mine of employer information. If nothing else, the phone book gives you the perfect overview of the types of employers in your community, including some you may not have known existed.

These last two options in particular may put you in “cold call” sales mode. Whenever possible, though, avoid the cold call. Instead, think “peer to peer” again. Is there another business, person, or group that could give you an introduction or, better yet, extend the invitation to participate directly?

take action! employer - friendly message & messengers

Develop a message that quickly hooks an employer, explains why you want to talk to them, and articulates the next step if they are (even remotely) interested! Identify natural employer “multipliers” – people (messengers), places, and organizations that extend your reach into employer circles.

STEP FOUR: PROVIDE PROACTIVE, PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Employers hire and supervise people all the time – not always young people. They have used mentoring for years, as a strategy to nurture young professionals within their company – again, not necessarily the type of mentoring you want them to do. Many have served on committees, even boards, but perhaps none with the mix of public and private sector organizations you have on your Youth Council or board.

Most employers will thrive in their role if you can provide them with five simple strands of support:

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Prepare a job description that outlines each employer’s role, responsibilities, and main activities. Mention interagency and internal duties that will help the employer fulfill his or her role and firmly integrate the work into the life of the company.

ORIENTATION

Most employers can’t commit to extensive training. You need to become a master of the short 1- to 2-hour orientation session. Job supervisors, mentors, tutors all need to know their responsibilities, suggested methods for fulfilling those responsibilities, how to work with the youth in your program, and general program expectations.

Employers who have been involved previously should definitely help design and deliver the orientation. Provide a simple reference packet or handbook with tools, tips, and contact information – employers will feel you’ve covered bases. You can always follow-up with additional training later. It will be more meaningful then.

SIMPLE FOCUSING TOOLS

Especially for employers who work directly with youth, a few simple tools can bring important structure and focus to the relationship. A work-based learning plan, for example, gives employers a device they can use to talk about projects and learning goals with youth. A list of suggested career exploration activities can keep a mentor from lying awake at night wondering what to do the next time they meet with their mentee.

SCREENING AND/OR MATCHING PROCESS

Employers don’t like surprises when taking a new person into their place of business. Many will gladly host a wide variety of youth, as long as they know what they are getting and feel they had choice in the matter. Employers count on you to assess and know young people you send their direction. You know (or should!) each youth’s skills, interests, and learning needs.

Employers usually prefer to treat youth employment the same way they would an adult hire. They want to review resumes, meet and interview youth, even in instances where there is only one youth and one job or internship opportunity. “Paper” matches – matches done by a coordinator, with no interaction between youth and a job or youth and a mentor – should only be used as a last resort.

ROUTINE CHECK-IN

Like a good customer service representative, check back periodically after the “sale” to see how your employer is doing in his or her new role. If anything isn’t going well, you can address it before bad patterns take hold. If everything is going great, who knows? Maybe your employer will want to upgrade (deepen their involvement)!

**take action!
proactive,
professional
support**

Review the suite of tools and methods you use to support employers. Little bit loose? Professionalize it! Create a toolkit that includes, at a minimum: a job description, a handout on important steps in the process (how they are matched with youth, support check-ins, etc.), simple tools or suggested activities they can use to guide their work with young people.

STEP FIVE: SOLICIT AND LISTEN TO EMPLOYER FEEDBACK

Above and beyond routine “how are things going” check-ins, you want employers to help you design things that work best for them. As your effort progresses, identify formal moments you can use to collect feedback and design input.

You can use surveys, focus groups, ad hoc design or review teams, special task forces, etc. In fact, moments like these often provide just the opportunity you need to affirm and engage people even more.

Look at these five areas in your quest for feedback:

GENERAL SATISFACTION

How did people (employers, other staff, and young people) feel about the experience?

OPERATIONS

Did the process unfold as planned or the way people thought it would and should?

QUALITY

Were activities, support, interactions, communications, etc., carried out with the highest of standards?

EFFICIENCY

Did the effort make good use of people’s time and resources?

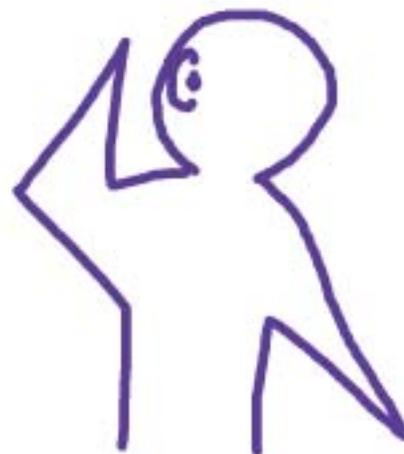
IMPACT

Did people see the results or changes expected?

If you ask for input, use it, and let people know you did. When you find an employer with a particularly valuable set of insights based on their experience with your effort, put them out front and be willing to step back into the wings. It’s exactly what you want and a sure sign that your employer engagement strategy is well on its way.

**take action!
employer
feedback**

Create a short evaluation that employers involved in your program can use to give you feedback. At least once a year, convene an employer focus group so that you get into more detail about needs and successful engagement and support methods.



Turf, Boundaries & Organizing Employer Involvement

Yours? Mine? Think like an employer.

One thing about employer engagement is very certain: you are not the only group looking for employers. Communities have different ways of handling this potentially competitive landscape.

Some have recognized “intermediaries” – organizations that broker and coordinate relationships between employers and youth organizations (and other organizations). One-Stop Centers play a variation of this role in some places. Chambers of Commerce or other education-business partnerships do it in other places.

Elsewhere, you might see a “zone” game underway. For example, in one city, schools can only partner with employers located in their area of the city. Elsewhere, employer recruitment is a free-for-all.

The years ahead will likely see continued push for more organized employer participation mechanisms. The Workforce Investment Act is one example of legislation pushing for them. In the meantime, there is no easy remedy for the situation. There are, however, a few general rules of thumb:

- Find out if you **have an existing or natural intermediary organization in your community**. If you do, support it! Given the number of requests they receive, many employers deeply appreciate such an entity. Help the group integrate your employer needs into any tools or marketing materials they use (don't expect them to figure this out).
- Think like an employer. **Employers often don't see boundaries and zones the way other organizations might** – for example, along political or educational district lines.
- You may think an employer is “yours” because you got there first or they are physically located in your area. Just remember that their employees and families, customers, partners, recruitment leads might live elsewhere. Find out their interests!
- If you run an after-school program and there are also in-school programs, **coordinate employer involvement or volunteer referral**. This way, you don't turn potential volunteers away – you find the best program or schedule fit.
- Competition can be good. Employers certainly appreciate it. If two programs approach, **an employer will choose the one that pays attention to their interests** and organizes quality services and support.

Activity One: To Be (Involved) or Not to Be

Goal

- Understand the challenges of engaging employers – from both perspectives, youth program staff and employers.

Time

- 15 minutes

Instructions

1. Divide into two groups: “employers” and “youth programs.” For this activity, shed your normal role. That is, if you are an employer, you don’t need to be for this activity. You may want to count off by twos to assign roles. Depending on the size of your group, you may have several tables of each role.

2. First, work alone. Write down 3-5 challenges you see from your point of view.

If you are an employer, what might keep you from getting involved with youth programs? What keeps you from participating as fully or effectively as you might like?

If you are a youth program representative, what is challenging about involving or working with employers?

3. Next, share what you wrote with your table. Then reach consensus on the top 3 to 5 most difficult challenges.

4. Write your group’s priority challenges on a flip chart. Select someone to present your results (in one minute or less) to the rest of the group. As a full group, briefly discuss your findings:

Have both perspectives been represented realistically?

Did the activity make you aware of something you hadn’t considered before?

Do you see any practical implications for how employers and youth programs work together?

My 3-5 Top Challenges...

Our Group’s Priority Challenges...

Activity Two: A View of What Employers Could Do

Goal

- Expand your thinking about how employers could help you do what you are trying to do for youth (as well as other one-stop customers).

Materials

- WIA Youth Elements Checklist

Time

- 30-45 minutes

Instructions

1. Review the WIA Youth Elements Checklist to get a sense of the services a strong, comprehensive youth development system can deliver.
2. Working in breakout groups (3-5 people), make a list of other youth needs and challenges you face as you provide services to youth.
3. Now, using both lists, brainstorm ways employers could help you. Don't limit yourselves to obvious roles outlined for employers. Think about:
 - Skills employers might have that your organization, One-Stop Center, or program doesn't
 - Resources they might be able to tap
 - Influence they may be able to bring to an issue
 - Things they can do because of the type of organization they are, that you can't do, for example, they are private sector rather than publicly funded
4. Ask one member of your group to keep a running list of ways employers can help. This is the start of your employer "Participation Menu."
5. Present your Participation Menu to the full group (1-2 minutes).
 - How many options did you identify?
 - What information would an employer need about each option in order to make a good decision about involvement?

WIA Youth Elements Checklist

Element	Examples of Services
✓ Tutoring, study skills training, instruction leading to completion of secondary school or equivalent	In-school tutoring program, activity-based after-school programs, dropout prevention, GED program
✓ Alternative secondary school services	Alternative school, juvenile offender facilities and programs
✓ Summer employment linked to academic and occupational learning	Structured summer job program, internship, student-initiated employment with work-based learning plan
✓ Paid and unpaid work experience	Internships, co-ops, job shadow, summer job, work-based volunteerism
✓ Occupational skills training	On-the-job training, high school/adult/ continuing education course, apprenticeship
✓ Leadership development	Community service, peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility
✓ Supportive services	Transportation assistance, childcare, housing, assistance with medical services, uniforms or other work attire, tools, eyeglasses and protective eyewear
✓ Adult mentoring during program participation and at least 12 months after	Workplace or community-based mentoring program
✓ 12-month follow-up support after program completion	Leadership development, regular contact with employer, including work-related assistance, assistance securing higher-paying jobs, career development and further education, work-related peer support groups, adult mentoring, tracking the progress of youth in employment after training
✓ Guidance and counseling	School-based guidance, academic and workplace skills and interest assessments, goal-setting, individualized services strategy (ISS) plan, drug and alcohol abuse counseling

Activity Three: Give & Get, Participation & Payoff

Goal

- Explore employer interests and how to incorporate them into a broader employer engagement strategy.

Materials

- Give & Get, Participation & Payoff Worksheet
- “Why Corporations Say They Get Involved with Youth Services” Handout

Time

- 30-60 minutes

Instructions

If you have employers in your group:

1. Ask group members to sit in “affinity” groups. Employers go to one table; youth program staff to another; teachers, instructors, or educators to another; etc.
2. Brainstorm and discuss your group’s interests – benefits you need or want out of your involvement with youth services. Be frank! Reach consensus on your group’s “Top 5” interests and record them.
3. Next, consider what types of “payoff” would show that the Top 5 interests were met. Give at least one example for each interest.
4. Report your Top 5 interests and payoff examples to the full group.

If you don’t have employers in your group:

1. Review the “Why Corporations Say They Get Involved with Youth Services” handout and discuss employer interests with your group. What “payoff” do employers receive for their involvement in WIA youth services? How does that match their interests?
2. With your group, identify 5 great examples of employer interests and the corresponding “payoff,” should they participate in youth programs.
3. Be ready to give your interest and payoff examples to the full group.

If employers are nearby (you are in a hotel, office near other offices or business, etc.):

1. In pairs, prepare to leave your session room. Your mission is to find an “employer” – someone who hires or supervises other people.
2. In 5-10 minutes, interview your employer about their company or organization’s involvement with youth or workforce development. Do they support programs that service youth? If so, why? If not, why, and is there any incentive or payoff that would make participation more enticing to them?

Be sure to explain who you are and that you have been asked to interview an employer quickly as part of a training session activity. Let them know that you are in no way judging them whatever their response, and that it’s totally okay to be frank.

3. Return to your session room and record any “interests” and “payoff” information you uncovered about involvement (or lack of it).
4. Be ready to give your interest and payoff examples to the full group.

Give & Get, Participation & Payoff Worksheet

Group	Interests	Payoff
<p>Example: <i>Employers</i></p>	<p><i>Good public relations</i></p>	<p><i>Mention in local newspaper article, employee newsletter, or industry association magazine</i></p>

Why Corporations Say They Get Involved with Workforce System Youth Services

- Strengthen the link between learning and work--have future job applicants learning the right things.
- Increase the pool of qualified applicants for current and future workforce needs.
- Reduce the cost of employee recruitment, selection and training.
- Support employees as parents.
- Improve relationships in the community as a result of working in partnerships.
- Improve the quality of community life.
- Give back to the community.
- Increase corporate name recognition.
- Add customers.
- Gain a reputation for being socially responsible.
- Increase employee loyalty, morale, and job satisfaction.
- Enhance recruitment and retention (people identified through volunteer situations; improved corporate reputation).
- Develop staff skills.
- Find a niche.
- Communicate a corporate message to the community.

Activity Four: Ready for Yes Employer Position Description

Goal

- Learn how to clearly communicate employer involvement opportunities, expectations and responsibilities, and time commitment.
- Be ready with involvement options and answers when employers say “yes.”

Materials

- Employer Position Description

Time

- 45-60 minutes

Instructions

1. Working in your breakout group, choose an employer role and complete the position description worksheet for it. Think back to your conversation about how employers could be involved (Activity Two).
2. Ask one group member to record your discussion. You don't need to agree on each element of the position description. Where there are different views, just capture both in your notes.
3. Select someone to report back a brief (two minute) summary of your Employer Position Description.

If your group finishes early, identify another role you need an employer to play. Create a second position description!

Employer Position Description

TITLE

What will you call this position? For example: Mentor, Youth Council Member, Homework Tutor, Summer Supervisor, Company Internship Coordinator

CHARGE

What is the main goal or mission of the position? Why is it important?

TIME FRAME

When does the position start and end? What is the weekly or monthly time commitment, when, and over what period?

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES

What would this person be expected to do? What regular actions does he or she need to take, or what activities would he or she manage? To whom would he or she communicate needs or report results?

Employer Position Description (continued)

KNOWLEDGE & ABILITIES

What skills and characteristics does this person need to be effective?

RELATED EXPERIENCE

What other experience – professional, community service, or other – would help in this “position”?

SUPPORT

What support (orientation, tools, materials, follow-up, etc.) will this person receive from you or your program in order to help them effectively fulfill their role?

CONTACT PERSON

Name and contact information for the person coordinating employer participation.

Activity Five: Minding the Message, Finding the Messengers

Goal

- Generate ideas for how to explain your effort and participation options to employers in understandable, persuasive ways.
- Identify tactics for spreading your message through employer circles.

Materials

- Employer Fact Sheet Template
- Employer Messaging Map
- Area business directories or phone books

Time

- 90 minutes

Instructions

1. In your breakout group, use the Employer Fact Sheet Template to create a recruitment tool you can use with employers. Each breakout group may want to take a particular type of employer: for example, small employers or a particular industry area like “health and medical services.” Look in your area phone book or a business directory for ideas!

2. Discuss each area of the template and brainstorm possible messages. Have a group member keep notes. Review the notes, and then identify the most clear, concise message(s) for your Fact Sheet.

Have a second group member keep track of time: give yourselves 5-10 minutes per section. Don’t be tortured wordsmiths. This is a brainstorming activity. You can fine-tune language later.

3. Have a member of your group give a short 2-minute summary to the full group on:

- What was easy and challenging about the exercise
- The section your group feels most proud of – a section that really came together

4. Now, with your breakout group, brainstorm ways you might deliver your message to employers.

- Where can you take the message? What marketing and recruitment channels exist?
- Who normally communicates with employers, when and how?

Use the Message Map to create a list of marketing opportunities that would advance your employer recruitment effort. Again, the phone book or area business directory can help you uncover sources you may not have thought about.

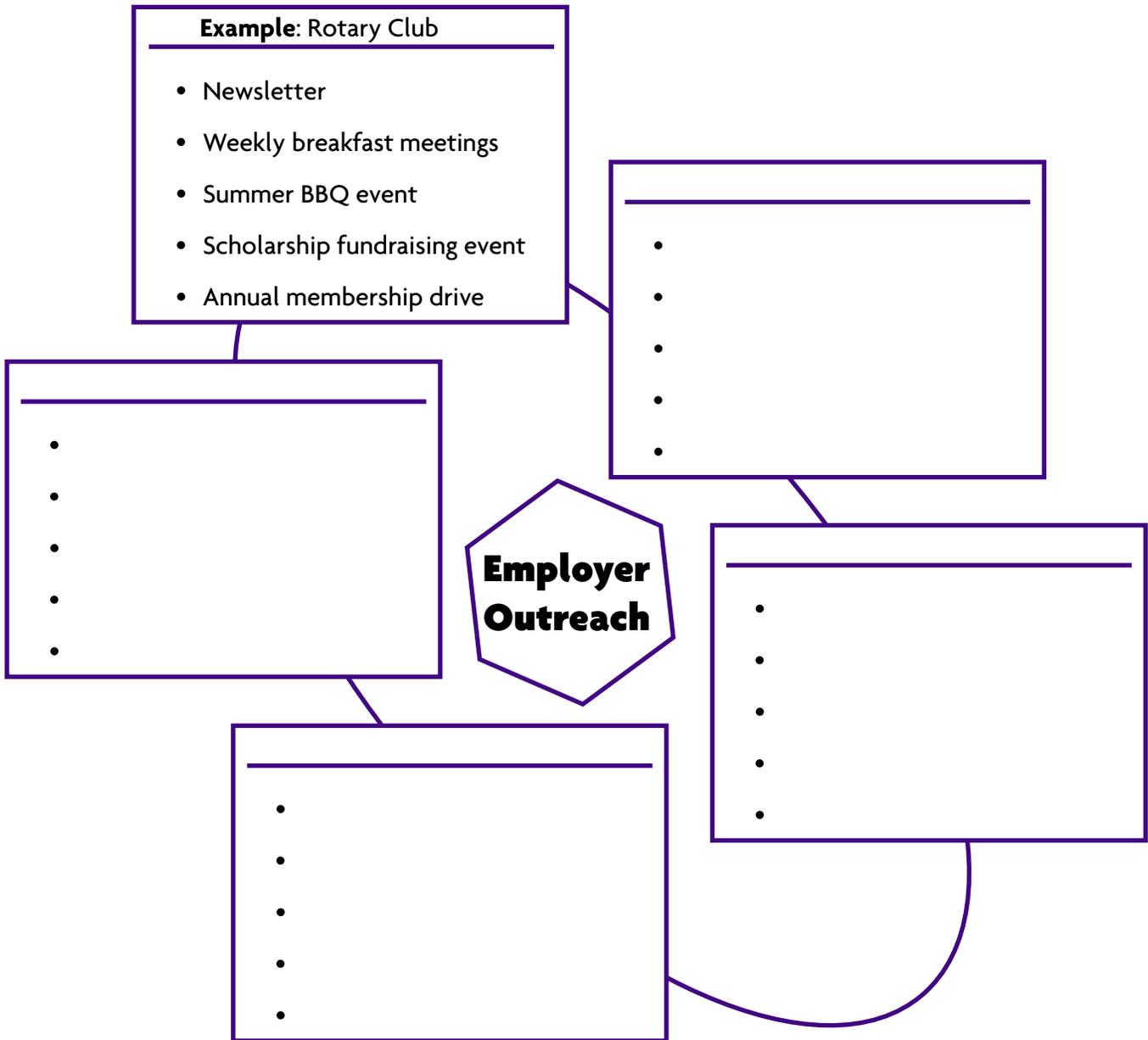
5. Ask a member of your group to share 4-5 examples from your list with the full group.

Employer Fact Sheet – Template	
PROBLEM OR RESULTS	In (only!) 1-2 sentences, what key issues – that employers care about – does your initiative address? What is the problem? What’s your solution?
BENEFITS	What benefits do employers receive from participation?
FEATURES	What are some of the features of the initiative?
INVOLVEMENT MENU	Where do employers fit in? What roles do you want them to play?

Employer Fact Sheet – Template (continued)	
<p>PARTNERS</p>	<p>Who else is on board? Who else, particularly other employers, is behind this effort?</p>
<p>ACTION</p>	<p>What should an interested employer do?</p>
<p>CONTACT</p>	<p>Name and contact information for the person coordinating employer participation.</p>

Employer Outreach and Messaging Map

Who supports, works, communicates, or is particularly persuasive with employers? Brainstorm and list at least FIVE examples. Next, identify 3-5 specific methods each uses to communicate with employers (i.e., newsletter, specific meeting, etc.) and list them below each example. Discuss these opportunities! How might you use them to get your message out to employers?



Activity Six: Finding Out What Employers Think

Goal

- Create a focus group you can use to jump-start your employer engagement effort, or check in to see how employers currently involved are doing.

Materials

- Employer Focus Group Template

Time

- 45-60 minutes

Instructions

If you are just starting to develop or scale up a strategy for engaging employers, you may want to use an employer focus group to gather information and input about what would work best in your area.

If you have a good recruitment strategy, you can use a focus group to check in on how employers are doing, what's working, and what could use extra attention.

1. With your breakout group, determine the purpose of a focus group you want to develop.
2. Develop 5-6 questions you think would be particularly effective to use in your focus group. What would you really want to know about or from employers in your area? You can record your questions on the Employer Focus Group Template and use the Focus Group Tips handout to guide you.
3. Have a group member record your questions on a piece of flip chart paper.
4. Be ready to give a 1-minute summary to the full group on your focus group goal and questions.

Employer Focus Group - Facilitator's Script	
HELLO	Your opening welcome and introduction of yourself and other team members.
PURPOSE	An overview of why you felt it was important to do a focus group with employers, the theme of the group, and what you will do with the information.
FORMAT	An overview of how you will run the focus group, how long it will go, and anything else participants should know. Will the session be documented? Taped or videotaped? Are there observers? Will participants be anonymous or identified in reports, etc.?
INTRODUCTIONS	A chance for participants to formally introduce themselves and provide information or background that may help others and you interpret their perspective on the theme of the focus group.
QUESTIONS	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
	6.
	7.
	8.
RECAP	Your closing summary of what you heard, with a chance for participants to provide last thoughts, corrections, etc.
THANK YOU	

Focus Group Tips

PREPARE A REALISTIC NUMBER OF QUESTIONS:

- 10 questions is an ambitious but good planning goal for a 2-hour focus group of 8-12 people.
- Prioritize the questions, with the “must know” questions at the top of the list.
- Prepare clear, concise, unambiguous questions. Review and test them beforehand.

USE NEUTRAL, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS (DON'T LEAD THE WITNESS!):

- What has your experience been with...
- What do you think about...
- Could you give me some examples of...
- Please tell me your reaction to...

BE INVITING:

- What can someone else tell me...
- Does anyone feel differently...
- Who else...
- Is there anyone we haven't heard from yet...
- Do others agree with this...

BE READY WITH GOOD FOLLOW-UP OR PROBING QUESTIONS:

- How so...
- What else...
- In what way...
- Could you tell me more about...

LOOK FOR WAYS TO BRING PRIORITIES, PREFERENCES, OR OPTIONS INTO SHARPER RELIEF:

- Ask people to rank order items.
- Ask for “most” or “least” important.
- Ask people to select from among items or options.
- Ask people to say the first thing that comes to mind on a topic, question, or item.

EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

The [CULINARY TRAINING INSTITUTE, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA](#), is the result of a ten-year union-multi-employer partnership – and a desperate need for work-ready employees. The Institute provides pre-employment training for new employees, upgrade training, ESL and other courses for employees of hotels and casinos. Training is not only free for most students – class fees are waived for employees of partners – but the hotel worker’s union will also waive membership dues while a student is enrolled and for a year after, upon successful completion. Many of the Institutes’ students learn about the Institute from other employees or from ads that run in union newsletters.

[TEXTRON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE ACADEMY, RHODE ISLAND](#) developed out of the Providence Chamber of Commerce’s work with three high schools as part of the city’s school-to-career initiative. The Academy is structured around a serious business ethic – students sign a contract that requires them to achieve 95% attendance and behave in a work-ready manner at all times – and paid internships with more than 30 city businesses. Students also attend a mandatory summer program. The Academy is the first Chamber-supported high school in the U.S. and Providence, Rhode Island’s first charter school.

A local McDonald’s franchise owner looked for a systemic response after seeing the patterns behind high turnover and job loss with lower wage employees – because they didn’t have access to the same services and benefits as high wage workers (reliable child care, transportation, communication tools, etc.). With the Pikes Peak Workforce Board and other Colorado state agencies, he formed the [AMERICAN’S FAMILY PROGRAM](#). The program provides employee email accounts, affordable computer and car purchase programs and access to health care, child care, housing and home-buying assistance, training and other services.

Employers in two [WEST TEXAS BOARD AREAS, ABILENE AND BROWNWOOD](#), are deeply concerned about soft skills. Each community has an ‘Employer Leadership Group on Soft Skills’ made up of each region’s most powerful employers. The Abilene group began meeting in July 2003 to develop a new curriculum aligned to national soft skills standards and TEKS educational standards, and to coordinate a launch event with area educational institutions and the Chamber of Commerce. Meanwhile, the Brownwood group started in August 2003 with a survey of area employers and has since put together a coalition ready to move forward on a broad-based initiative to improve soft skills curriculum and training.

The [IMPERIAL VALLEY BUSINESS/EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE IN EL CENTRO, CALIFORNIA](#), developed a companion to the high school diploma. Students can earn an Employability Certificate – they must pass a proficiency test and demonstrate good attendance, interpersonal skills, extracurricular activity, and employment preparation experiences. They also create an employment portfolio that includes an interest inventory, autobiographical statement, career goals and cluster choice, resume, cover letter, job application samples and interview experience.

Employers frequently report that their biggest problem with the public employment system is referral of non-qualified applicants. The same can be true for youth positions. [PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA’S PLEDGE-A-JOB PROGRAM](#), based at the multi-service Kino Teen Center, uses a few simple methods to improve traditional youth job placement. Employers pledge job openings – everything from temporary or permanent to summer or after-school positions. Youth interested in this pool of opportunities must attend an employability skills workshop. Then, with the support of their Pledge-a-Job counselor, young people interview with employers for positions that best match their qualifications. Works for youth, works for employers.

RESOURCES

- America Connects – Tips for Connecting with Employers
http://www.americaconnects.net/resources/JobPlacement.asp#_Connecting_With_Employers
- Cornell Youth and Work Program – Workplace Mentoring Training Tools
<http://www.human.cornell.edu/youthwork/mentoring/training.html>
- Employer’s Guide to Working with Youth - Connections Consortium/Tech Prep, Thurston County, Washington
<http://www.connectquest.org/employer/guid.asp>
- Getting Employers Involved: Improving Work-Based Learning Through Employer Links (pdf) -Learning and Skills Development Agency, United Kingdom. Geared to YMCA training managers.
<http://www.lsd.org.uk/files/pdf/R1084.pdf>
- Making the Connections: The Role of Employer Associations in Workforce Development (pdf) -National Association of Manufacturers, Center for Workforce Success, 2000.
http://www.nam.org/Docs/CenterforWorkforceSuccess/24187_Purpleconnex.pdf
- NELC Employer Participation Model
<http://www.nelc.org/whatsnew/epm/epm.cfm>
- Reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act: What Employers Say About Workforce Development (pdf)- Workforce Innovations Networks (US Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers, Jobs for the Future), 2003.
http://www.nam.org/Docs/CenterforWorkforceSuccess/26879_WIAreauthorization.pdf
- Texas Association of Businesses
<http://www.texbiz.org>
- U.S. Chamber –Workforce Preparation Tools & Resources
<http://www.uschamber.com/cwp/tools/default>
- Utilizing Employer Involvement to Create Successful Partnerships - Slide presentation from the One-Stop Partnership Conference, Anaheim, 2002. <http://www.lrginc.org/YCN/pdf/employers.pps>

Our thanks to the many people who helped bring this training series to life:

- Board members and staff of Texas' 28 local workforce boards who were easily accessible, frank and thoughtful about their work, and eager to share lessons learned and examples.
- TWC staff members who also reviewed drafts and helped us clarify nuances of policy, definition, and language.
- Texas youth program staff, educators, and workforce professionals who participated in or facilitated training courses using field test copies of packet materials.
- The talented crew of School & Main Institute coaches and adjunct faculty working closely with Texas boards during the preparation of these materials. This packet owes a particular debt to Elizabeth Vasquez and Suzanne Hershey.