Introduction by Facilitator (Rob Hodapp)

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), OVR is mandated to prioritize services to transition students ages 14-21. In addition, PA OVR was selected to receive intensive support through the Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC) to learn about and implement job-driven practices.

With these goals and available support, our goal as an agency is to increase paid work-based learning experiences for transition age students with disabilities. We’ve decided to go straight to the key players for the foundation to our initiative: businesses and employers.

Today, we hope to gather your input as valuable members of the business community to allow us to develop an effective way to market our talent in a way that meets your needs. Let’s get started.

Take a moment to think back to your very first job. [Pause]

Why did you seek that first job? Was it an expectation or an internal desire?

How did you land that first job? Did someone help you with the process?

Looking back now, how did your experience in that first job impact you?

As you likely have experienced firsthand, that “first job” is an important stepping stone in both personal and career development – whether you stayed in that particular career trajectory or veered sharply away from it.

Research indicates that paid work experiences are a key indicator in longer term career success. Such experiences may include full-time or part-time positions through internships, summer youth employment, seasonal positions, and other temporary positions for youth.

In our experience, students with disabilities may be more likely to miss out on opportunities to obtain a “first job.” By default, they may miss out on an important opportunity to jump start their personal and career development. Perhaps students with disabilities have not been encouraged to seek employment – or perhaps they do not have the same access to employment as their mainstream age peers. How can we increase access to this milestone opportunity for students with disabilities, ages 14-21?

We will begin with 10 open-ended discussion questions to collect your feedback. Then, after you’ve had a chance to answer the questions, we will briefly describe OVR’s current employer engagement practices, welcoming any additional feedback you might be able to offer.

Discussion Questions for the Round Table

1. Does your business or organization currently offer paid positions for students? Why or why not?
2. Based on firsthand or hypothetical experience, describe some potential benefits of hiring students for paid positions. What value could students bring to your organization?
   1. What kind of supports could increase these benefits?
3. Based on firsthand or hypothetical experience, describe some potential challenges of hiring students for paid positions. What risks might hiring students present to your organization? Are there systems issues that would make hiring students a challenge (e.g., payroll structure)?
   1. What kind of supports could reduce or eliminate these concerns?
4. Please describe positions within your company that currently offer paid work experiences for students or have the potential to offer paid work experiences to students in the future.
5. What might encourage your company to increase the number of available paid positions for students?
6. How might paid work experiences be structured (hours of work, length of assignments, pay scale, etc.)?
7. How might paid work experiences for students be categorized or labeled? What terminology would your company use? What particular skill sets would be required for a paid work experience? How might entry level paid work experiences fit into career ladders or pathways?
8. How should OVR staff approach you to increase paid work experiences for students? Who makes staffing/hiring decisions within your company? What delivery method or format would be most effective?
9. How would you prefer to be connected to potential student employees? What support would you need to streamline the onboarding process?
10. In an ideal situation, what ongoing support would you need after hiring a student with a disability for a paid work experience? If you have hired OVR candidates in the past, what support worked well? What supports should be added/improved?

Any final thoughts or comment before we move on?

Brief Overview of OVR’s Current Employer Engagement Practices

OVR makes every attempt to use a single point-of-contact method for direct employer engagement. Business Services Representatives develop relationships with local employers, in an effort to develop placement opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Staff may present written information (brochures, fact sheets, handbooks) or verbal information (individual meetings, group presentations) to employers to introduce them to the agency and our candidates for employment.

Additional OVR staff members are tasked with preparing individual candidates for employment through self-exploration, career exploration, resume development, application completion, and interview practice.

OVR staff members are able to offer the following supports, based on need:

* Follow-up and feedback limited to contact with the employee
* Direct consultation with the employer to address any concerns
* Intervention regarding essential job functions and/or reasonable accommodations
* Financial support for the employer through the use of time limited wage reimbursement
* On-site one on one support for the employee through the use of an external job coach/trainer

Please offer general feedback on OVR’s current approach. How might it be improved? How might it be altered to address employer needs when hiring students with disabilities?

Does anyone have any final thoughts or comments?

Thank you for your time, attention, and feedback. We hope to incorporate your valuable input into practice to increase paid work-based learning experiences for transition age students with disabilities. We plan to provide updates on our progress and outcomes in the future.