Boot Camp Project Narrative: Team Maine

The 2020-2021 Disability & Employment Boot Camp supported teams in their efforts to design and test innovative ideas in their evolving workforce landscapes; ideas that will strengthen system capacity to increase employment of Americans with disabilities.

Experience Stages

Convening Team	Defining Challenge	Building Empathy	Identifying Solution	Prototyping Solution	Testing and Refining Prototype	Defining Next Steps

Team Maine Participants

- **Joshua Howe** (Lead), State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
- **Patti Saarinen**, Eastern Maine Development Corporation
- **Darcy Brockman**, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- **Dan Belyea**, Maine Community College System
- **Denise Garland**, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
- **Joan Dolan**, Bureau of Employment Services
- **Ben Gilman**, Maine State Chamber of Commerce
- **Patricia Gray**, Bureau of Employment Services

Defining the Challenge

Experience Highlights

The team completed a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to help clarify the challenge with current business engagement. The team identified key stakeholders.

Results

Original Vision Statement

"The primary challenge for Maine is overcoming the stigma and misperception by employers that people with disabilities are not a viable workforce with a wide range of talents and abilities that could benefit their operations."

SWOT Analysis

Team Maine thought through their challenge statement in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. While they identified that there are a lot of engaged and interested organizations and programs in the state, they also identified information silos and lack of awareness of resources and accommodations. Further, while they identified opportunities in revamping the state's economy and working with more WIOA partners, they also acknowledged the threat of the pandemic and companies being risk adverse.

Refined Vision Statement

"Develop coordinated message promoting employment of IWD which incorporates talking points for employers that highlight success stories and strategies. Develop a road map for support which identifies key individuals/point-people, across the state."

Key Stakeholders

- Department of Labor
- Department of Economic and Community Development
- Maine Community College System
- University of Maine System
- Adult Education
- Local Workforce Boards
- Service Providers
- Workforce Partners
- Employers
- Constituents/ participants

Building Empathy

Experience Highlights

The team learned about the benefits and techniques for building empathy, which enabled them to get inspired with the employers they hope to serve. The team synthesized their learnings to identify patterns and surprising insights to inspire new opportunities for design. The team recognized that employers are used to being approached to make a hire rather than being approached by workforce to

determine what they need. Further, the team realized the need to capture the attention of employers with limited capacity through leveraging relevant resources.

The team interviewed more than 20 employers and organizations. The team began to think through the ideas of a toolkit, FAQ, or webinars to educate employers and sustain engagement. The team also agreed to include empathy building as a practice going forward to consistently listen to employers' needs.

Results

Organizations Interviewed

Employers interviewed included a large healthcare provider, energy company and technology company as well as small businesses. Businesses were largely clustered in the central and southern part of the state. Representatives of businesses included front line managers as well as human resource professionals.

Key Insights

1. Need to convince employers that they will not "get in trouble" by talking about hiring practices for IWDs, nor for discussing accommodation with employees.

2. In larger organizations, the separation between human resources and hiring managers poses a difficulty in sharing relevant information.

3. Larger organizations have more resources to get advice and assistance when accommodating employees.

4. Employees maybe be resistant to having conversations around their disabilities with employers. Likewise, IWD may not realize that they have a disability and how accommodations might help them in their work.

5. There is also a difference between hiring IWDs and supporting incumbent workers with disabilities.

6. Employers have cost concerns pertaining to accommodations and tax credits with many employers – this bootcamp may be an opportunity to circulate resources on this.

7. Employers may not realize number of individuals with disabilities they already employ.

8. Accommodations are a concern - cost and how to best accommodate individuals. Accommodating in physical occupations viewed as more difficult than office or administrative occupations.

9. Employers not always aware of the resources available to them either through Main Department of Labor (MDOL) or other workforce partners.

10. Perception of "the State" not necessarily being resource but as enforcer. Doesn't always have positive connotation.

Final Vision Statement

"Develop coordinated message promoting employment of IWD which incorporates talking points for employers that highlight success stories and strategies. Develop a road map for support which identifies key individuals/point-people, across the state."

Final How Might We Statement

How might we improve the hiring of and retention of individuals with disabilities through the creation and dissemination of curriculum and resources that empowers workforce system staff to better engage and support businesses in hiring and retention IWD?

Identifying a Solution

Experience Highlights

As the team conducted empathy building and convened, potential solutions were identified. Potential solutions revolved around how to engage businesses with targeted resources that various agencies could leverage. The team collaborated on an initial document, which team-lead Joshua Howe presented to the State Workforce Board on March 12. The team also participated in a Peer session where they gained insights from other teams. By gathering feedback from employers, the State Workforce Board, and other stakeholders, the Boot Camp team coalesced around a potential solution.

Results

Potential Solutions Identified

1. FAQ for employers hiring IWDs and accommodating current employees

2. Targeted resource guide for employers hiring IWDs

3. Series of educational webinars for employers

4. Roadmap for hiring and supporting IWDs

5. Education for WDS professionals on having conversations with employers about employment of IWDs.

Chosen Solution to Prototype

The team identified that there wasn't a single element which was going to "move the needle" on employment of people with disabilities. Raising awareness without being able to back it up with information and support was not going to help employers or IWDs. The team developed an overarching strategy which includes complementary activities of raising awareness and outreach, employer resources and toolkit, as well as training for workforce development staff. The team decided to move forward on developing and piloting a training for workforce development system staff in talking to employers about disability and disability employment.

Prototyping Solution

Experience Highlights

As part of the initial strategy, the team had identified a number of areas where staff could use more support. While they understood the importance of employment of people with disabilities, they needed more facts to be able to talk to employers about, information on resources should the employer need something and scripts or prepared responses should the employer present a roadblock or need information.

The team have developed two multi-module trainings for WDS staff.

Results

- Completed high level strategy document which incorporates awareness and support regarding employment of PWD.

- Pilot trainings are in draft form and developed delivered to pilot group in May/June 2021. The first training is for broad audience and serves as introduction to disability employment and could include WDS staff, as well as employers and other interested parties. The second training is focused on WDS staff in how to engage and partner with employers in the hiring and retention of people with disabilities to meet their workforce needs.

Testing and Refining the Prototype

Experience Highlights:

The multi-module trainings will be piloted using Zoom (synchronously) to a small group of WDS staff to get initial feedback. It will then be refined into an on-line training courses which can be accessed asynchronously, and successful participants will be awarded a level-one micro credential after completing the program.

The Maine Community College/ Maine Quality Center is providing the technical assistance to turn the training into a self-directed, asynchronous training and digital badge/ micro credential.

Results:

Pilot trainings are in draft form as a PowerPoint presentation. The first focuses on the basics of disability employment, scale of disability, overview of legislation such as the ADA, business benefit and ROI, and introduction to accommodations. The second training focuses in on specific strategies of partnering with employers in the hiring and retention of people with disabilities to meet their workforce needs.

Outlining Next Steps

Experience Highlights:

Following the end of the Bootcamp, the State Workforce Board will take responsibility for shepherding the remaining elements of the strategy.

Results

- Finalize pilot training materials including narration for presentation
- Gather feedback from pilot audience and refine presentation
- Develop and implement asynchronous online trainings
- Launch and promote online training for WDS staff statewide.

Appendix

SWOT

Strengths

Kim: Maine is full of super engaged and interested parties that can help us achieve the objective.

Darcy: Work experiences, summer youth work programs, job shadows, VR Apprenticeship Pilot.

Denise: Good partners throughout Maine willing to work together.

Joshua: Maine is very lean, few partners so we know each other but means that it's also a challenge because of limited resources.

Patti: People in workforce system with experience to carry out the work.

Joan: Maine is small and nimble.

Joshua: Engaged partners.

Darcy: Great employers that have already had great success working with our clients.

Joshua: VR is in MDOL.

Darcy: Great employers that have already had great success working with our clients.

Joshua: Increased coordination between WIOA programs.

Dan: The workforce systems are ready for this conversation.

Patti: Employment community more open to diverse populations.

Joan: Sector training cohort model operating within WIOA partners and MCCS.

Weaknesses

Joan: Silos, lack of awareness by employers of benefits.

Denise: Maine is primarily made up of small businesses and they are not aware of the diverse workforce opportunities that may be available to them.

Dan: Time and funding.

Joan: Money, time.

Darcy: Maine is a big state. Job opportunities in some counties are limited that in other towns.

Denise: Lots of jobs available and perception that there are not enough people to fill those jobs.

Kim: Connecting with small to medium employers is always a challenge.

Opportunities

Joshua: Employers needing workers. Pre-covid had very low unemployment rate in Maine- hungry employers.

Joan: Strength of team gathered to discuss/make a plan to address; developing a plan.

Dan: With the lack of skilled workers business will participate.

Kim: Governor's economic plan contains focus areas (including youth employment elements) that can support this effort, which helps to build capacity. Ex: Children's Cabinet. We are embedded in these efforts.

Patti: Community partners are working more closely together.

Joshua: DECD and MDOL coordinating programs better now.

Joan: Connection to associations and chambers to reach small and medium sized employers to engage them with sector training / apprenticeship.

Darcy: Connecting more with WIOA partners. Some partners are working more together than others.

Kim: Again- there are other collaborations we can connect to (Children's cabinet, Maine Spark, etc.) we can engage with to support and move the work forward.

Threats

Dan: ROI and the need to make business aware of the positive results from others.

Joshua: COVID could shift focus away.

Darcy: Business still thinking of the risks of hiring clients.

Kim: COVID.