

This publication was developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist in the planning and development of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The guides in this series offer "how to" information on starting up a center, creating programs and identifying center partners; center and program profiles and a wealth of resources.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1995. Since then, hundreds of centers have opened throughout the United States. These centers provide residents of HUD-assisted and/or -insured properties with programs, activities and training promoting economic self-sufficiency. These guides contain examples of successful center initiatives and how you can replicate them.

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**HOW TO DESIGN AND DELIVER AN
EFFECTIVE JOB READINESS
TRAINING PROGRAM**

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How to Design and Deliver an Effective Job Readiness Training Program for Neighborhood Networks Centers

Introduction

This is the first publication in the Neighborhood Networks Employment Series. It focuses on how Neighborhood Networks centers can deliver effective job readiness training programs for residents who are on public assistance, are unemployed or are underemployed.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative launched by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Office of Multifamily Housing in September 1995. It encourages the development of resource and community technology centers in HUD-assisted and/or -insured properties. There are over 800 centers in operation and more than 682 properties with centers under development as of July 2001.

Neighborhood Networks centers that seek to promote self-sufficiency of their residents should be aware of the various local training and employment opportunities available. Housing support by itself is not enough to help residents become economically self-sufficient.

The Neighborhood Networks Employment Series includes information on the following four topics:

- Job readiness training.
- Job development and placement.
- Follow-up retention services.
- Career growth and advancement.

Purpose of the Handbook

Job readiness training provides an essential first step to help unemployed or low-income individuals make the transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency. Job readiness training focuses on life

skills such as time management, conflict resolution, problem solving, professional dress and demeanor, and communication skills. This guide provides a 13-step approach to design and delivery of a job readiness program. The steps in this approach are:

1. Choose and organize an effective job readiness training program for residents.
2. Communicate to staff and residents the importance of job readiness training.
3. Involve employers in the training.
4. Connect with job developers and placement providers.
5. Identify and evaluate employment strengths and barriers of the target population.
6. Categorize the target population.
7. Create a mission statement and training goals.
8. Establish individual participation rules.
9. Design the job readiness training including the length, format and curriculum.
10. Build staff capacity by training the trainer.
11. Review and assess the trainers.
12. Measure outcomes.
13. Provide case management support.

How Centers Can Use This Handbook

Neighborhood Networks centers can use this guide in different ways depending on how they deliver employment services.

- Direct Delivery.** Some centers might implement the strategies included in the guide to deliver job

development and placement services. This guide includes some strategies that every center can apply and some strategies only centers with larger staffs will be able to apply.

- ❑ **Contract or Partner with Other Service Providers.** Some Neighborhood Networks centers may elect to turn to local nonprofit or for-profit job placement organizations as well as public entities, such as the local Private Industry Council (PIC) or Workforce Investment Board, to provide job placement services for their residents. In this case, this guide can serve as a resource for evaluating and selecting service providers.

Thirteen Steps to Design and Deliver an Effective Job Readiness Training Program

Step 1. Choose and Organize an Effective Job Readiness Program for Residents

Neighborhood Networks centers have three options for providing a job readiness training program. They can use Neighborhood Networks center staff and residents to deliver the training, contract with a nonprofit or for-profit training vendor or partner with a local public sector provider. Each of these options is described below.

- ❑ **Use Neighborhood Networks center staff and residents to deliver the training.** This option has several potential benefits. Utilizing center staff and residents to deliver the training can generate a more enthusiastic reception by program participants. It can also serve as a self-esteem builder for resident “trainers.” Furthermore, once operational, the program will cost less than contracting with an outside vendor to deliver it.

To use Neighborhood Networks center staff and residents to deliver the training, it will first be necessary to identify potential staff and residents who are motivated to deliver this type of training. These individuals must have good interpersonal skills and advanced communication abilities.

They should be creative and flexible in finding ways to achieve program goals and objectives.

The next step will involve identifying and evaluating the best local service providers that offer job readiness training and that have “train the trainer” programs to instruct center staff and residents about how to deliver the training. Local provider resources are discussed below.

- ❑ **Contract with a nonprofit or for-profit training vendor.** Contracting with a nonprofit or for-profit training vendor will allow Neighborhood Networks centers to implement job readiness training immediately instead of waiting for center staff and residents to be trained. In addition, a provider offers a verifiable record of effectiveness and none of the risks a Neighborhood Networks center would face starting its own program. Lastly, using job readiness training providers that have established relationships with employers will increase the likelihood of job placements for graduates.

It is important to evaluate potential nonprofit or for-profit training vendors that have been identified. Start with local provider resources described below.

Verify the performance of job readiness training vendors to assess the quality and content of the program. This should include an evaluation of completion, job placement, and retention outcomes of graduates from previous years. Other ways to evaluate the effectiveness of potential providers include checking with program graduates and local employers for their assessment of the job readiness training provider and have staff observe vendors conducting ongoing job readiness training. For local recommendations of the best providers, contact listings in the section below on National Best Practice Job Readiness Training Models.

- ❑ **Partner with a local public sector provider.** Most Local Private Industry councils (PICs) or One-Stop Workforce Development Career Centers offer job readiness training, but quality and effectiveness vary. Additionally, nonprofit

service providers generally provide better training than public sector providers and, therefore, have better reputations with employers. Use a public sector provider if no other job readiness training exists or if the Neighborhood Networks center budget will not support other training. Most local public sector training providers are required by federal mandate to offer job readiness training to welfare recipients and access to public funding permits them to offer more training cycles during a 12-month period than nonprofit providers. Furthermore, open-entry, open-exit training rules permit these providers to offer more opportunities to job seekers without skills or workplace experience. To evaluate the program, follow the same steps as above.

- ❑ **Identify local provider resources.** To identify the best nonprofit and for-profit employment training vendors, investigate the following resources:
 - PICs or Workforce Development Board.
 - Local Department of Labor.
 - Government entity with responsibility for training and placement of TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) clients.
 - The Local Chamber of Commerce or business organization.
 - For-profit temporary employment agencies.
 - The American Society for Training and Development's national database of training providers (phone: 703-683-8100).
 - Local service provider directories published in selected cities by the Welfare-to-Work Partnership (phone: 202-955-3005) in conjunction with The Enterprise Foundation and the United Way.

Step 2. Communicate to Staff and Residents the Importance of Job Readiness Training

Nationally, employers agree about one common factor in successful recruitment — people interviewing

for entry-level jobs must have sufficient soft skills (life skills such as strong work ethic, reliability, punctuality, good communication skills, etc.) to get hired and remain employed. Communicating this employer “standard” to center staff and the resident population will offer the following benefits:

- ❑ **Emphasize the employment focus of the training.** This begins the process of moving participants into an active job readiness training mode.
- ❑ **Obtain buy-in of the training from residents.** Getting acceptance of this employer requirement from residents will motivate them to take the training seriously.
- ❑ **Make training participants more employer focused.** As job seekers become more sensitive to employer requirements, they focus more on achieving employment and self-sufficiency goals. It also ensures higher training success.
- ❑ **Ensure a more productive recruitment effort for the training.** A sound understanding and acceptance of the value of job readiness training by staff will help them to communicate more effectively with residents as they begin the recruitment process.

Step 3. Involve Employers in the Training

An intrinsic part of any successful job readiness training is the involvement and participation of local employers, particularly those who are actively seeking job-ready, entry-level employees. Encourage employers to help in the design and delivery of the training. This type of employer involvement is important for several reasons.

- ❑ **Sends a message of hope to participants in the training.** Employer involvement shows participants that there are *real* job opportunities after the training, and there are employers interested in helping them to succeed.
- ❑ **Exposes participants to workplace culture.** Participants begin to understand what it takes to get hired and promoted within a specific company.

- ❑ **Provides participants with the opportunity to speak with employers.** Participants have the opportunity to ask questions about the company's policies and procedures. The interaction also builds self-esteem and confidence.

Neighborhood Networks centers should conduct employer outreach and handle the scheduling of visits to the training site by employers, line supervisors and human resource (HR) personnel. Encourage employers and HR personnel to bring job applications and to spend sufficient time answering all of the training participants' questions about the company. Staff should encourage visiting employers or HR officers to conduct on-site interviews of participants who are job ready. Centers should set aside a private room for interviews.

Step 4. Establish Relationships With Local Job Placement Providers

Encourage service providers who do job placement to participate in the training and to meet with prospective job seekers. The participation of job placement specialists adds credibility to the training and sends a message to students that they will receive ample opportunities for getting jobs if they complete the training.

The curriculum should incorporate site visits by job placement specialists. The visits should provide an opportunity for the job placement specialist to meet each student participant individually. A center should obtain an agreement from the placement provider that it will furnish post-training employment outcome data on all of the center's referrals.

Step 5. Identify and Evaluate the Employment Strengths and Barriers of the Target Population

To design an effective job readiness training program, Neighborhood Networks centers must understand and be able to identify the employment barriers and skills of the residents to be served.

- ❑ **Assessment of barriers.** Identify the barriers to employment for each training participant, such as transportation, child or elder care and substance abuse.

- ❑ **Assessment of skills, aptitudes and preferences.** This assessment should include academic testing of reading, writing, and math skills as well as English proficiency and aptitude. A job seeker's preferences are also very important to identify since an individual's desire to work in a specific field or occupation affects job retention. A sample assessment form can be found in the Appendix.

This data becomes especially important as the target population moves into the job placement phase. Organize this information into a database that can be used by case managers as they provide support and assistance to individuals through the job readiness training and placement process that follows. There are commercially available software programs specifically designed for client service, tracking and reporting.

Step 6. Create a Mission Statement and Training Goals

Both staff and students need an effective mission statement for the training to help them establish and achieve goals. The participants should commit to improve their attitudes, career paths and lifestyles.

Training goals are often specific targets tailored to individual participants. Trainers often encourage participants to create their own goals for the training and strategies to achieve them. Goals may include the resolution of barriers or a change in specific behaviors. For example, a participant who is chronically late for appointments can set punctuality as a goal. Specific goals also help individuals assume responsibility and take ownership of their future.

Step 7. Establish Individual Participation Rules

Individual participation rules help participants modify negative behaviors. Basic rules should include:

- ❑ Prohibition of alcohol or drug use.
- ❑ Punctuality – showing up on time.
- ❑ Consistent attendance.
- ❑ Positive attitude.

Participants must understand that the rules for the training are the same as those in the workplace. Those who are chronically late for work or absent will be fired, without exception. At the outset, inform participants that if they violate any of the rules they will be expelled from the training cycle.

Establish a fixed number of permissible absences and late arrivals. Expel participants who go beyond the minimum number and allow them to start again in a new training cycle. Generally, two unexcused absences or three late arrivals to the class provide sufficient grounds for removal. Staff should also decide what constitutes a permissible excuse and communicate those rules orally and in writing to all participants.

Step 8. Assess the Job Readiness Levels of the Target Population

Categorize the target population into levels of job readiness. The levels should vary by the participants' strengths, weaknesses and issues that pose barriers to employment.

- Job Readiness Level I** – Individuals with a recent work history, no health problems or obvious employment barriers, and motivated to find a job.
- Job Readiness Level II** – Individuals with no employment history, who are physically and mentally able to work but have various employment barriers, such as child care, transportation, domestic abuse or low self-esteem.

Depending on available staff resources, it may be more effective to develop two different training models based on the participants' job readiness.

Step 9. Design the Job Readiness Training

The job readiness training curriculum, format and length must be designed with the participants' job readiness level in mind.

Job Readiness Level I

Length of training: 7 to 10 days.

Format: In-class instruction and outside job interviews.

Orientation day: Schedule an orientation day before the first day of training to explain the goals, objectives, curriculum and rules that participants must abide by in order to graduate from the training. Participants will then have time to decide whether they are ready to take the training. The orientation will help screen out those who are feeling ambivalent about the program or lack the necessary motivation to complete it. Training should begin promptly at the scheduled time.

Curriculum: Focus on the subject areas described below.

- Goals.** Participants should have personal goals and objectives that they want to achieve, including the type of job they want. Goal setting provides participants with choices about their lives and encourages them to take responsibility.
- Communication skills.** This is an essential soft skill that every entry-level job seeker needs in order to get hired and keep a job. Most employers and human resource officers acknowledge that this is often the most important quality on which hiring decisions are made. Encourage participants to present their goals to the class. This exercise improves communication skills and boosts confidence.
- Interview techniques.** As part of the communication skills segment, participants should work on eye contact, posture, body language, a firm handshake and interview skills. The most effective job readiness training courses use video cameras to record participants in mock interviews. This is an important learning device and should be included, budget permitting.
- Effective résumé.** Regardless of the lack of prior work experience, a job seeker should understand the importance of a properly prepared résumé and how to produce one. Even a résumé listing basic biographical data about the applicant sends a positive message to the interviewer that the applicant is highly

motivated to obtain a job and understands how the process works.

- ❑ **Dress for success.** Professional dress can mean the difference between getting a job or not. Appropriate attire for a job interview is often different than what is appropriate to wear once a person is hired. Many programs provide proper interview attire for welfare or low-income job seekers.
- ❑ **Employment application forms.** Participants should have the opportunity to review many different job application forms, including those of employers they will be interviewing with. This will help to improve their confidence level as they prepare for the interview.
- ❑ **Job search and career options.** The knowledge of how to find a job, how to network and how to arrange an interview is essential for those with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency. The first job they get after training will not be their last. Participants should be prepared and encouraged to find better paying jobs with career potential.

Job Readiness Level II

Length of training: Three to four weeks (35-40 hours per week).

Format: In-class instruction and outside job interviews.

Orientation day: Schedule an orientation day before the first day of training to explain goals, objectives, curriculum and rules of participation. (Same as described in Job Readiness Level I above.)

Curriculum: Focus on the issue areas listed in Job Readiness Level I in addition to the issues below.

- ❑ **Employment barrier resolution.** As part of the curriculum, participants should work on barriers to employment. Trainers should discuss these issues with each participant throughout the course. WorkNet Training Services, a California-based soft skills training program (contact information is listed in the National Best Practices

Job Readiness Training Models section), formulated a 10-step program for helping the hard-to-serve overcome major barriers preventing them from making the transition from welfare to work. The 10 steps take participants from identifying and removing their employment barriers to finding an appropriate employer.

- ❑ **Self-esteem and confidence-building.** This is an essential area of improvement for those participants without workplace experience or job skills.
- ❑ **Time and stress management.** Help participants improve chronic punctuality problems and suggest strategies for dealing with the resulting stress caused by poor time management.
- ❑ **Money management and budgeting.** This is a critical skill for participants who want to reorganize their lives and prepare for the eventual challenges of living without the aid of public assistance. This segment of the training typically includes how to open a checking or savings account and tips for balancing a checkbook.
- ❑ **Employer interviews.** Participants in the longer pre-employment training cycle should be prepared and required to take a minimum of two to three actual job interviews to give them the experience and post-interview assessment.

Step 10. Build Staff Capacity in Training

One of the essential aspects of a successful soft skills training course is the ability of the trainer to deliver the curriculum in a credible and inspirational manner. Trainers of the most successful job readiness training models play different roles simultaneously. These roles include that of teacher, authority figure, disciplinarian, role model, parent, friend and potential employer. Trainers must have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, be sensitive and have motivational training skills. They must also understand and be able to communicate the employers' perceptions and point of view about hiring.

Centers that decide to use in-house staff as trainers should explore “train the trainers” courses offered by many job readiness training vendors. Funding for this specific type of activity does not exist. If the training entity also provides job placement, the center could try to negotiate an agreement to refer its job-ready graduates for job placement in exchange for a lower fee to train its trainers. Service providers are likely to agree to this because they are oftentimes looking for a reliable source of job-ready candidates.

Step 11. Evaluate the Trainers

Reviewing and assessing trainers ensures the continued improvement and quality management of the training. An evaluation form should be prepared and completed by every participant on the last day of the training. The center should assign other staff to periodically monitor the training and submit and review independent evaluations. Following the review, center management staff should meet with the trainer to discuss findings and approaches for improving the next training cycle.

Step 12. Measure Outcomes

Measuring outcomes is an essential requirement for any type of stand-alone training. Job readiness training is no exception. Centers should assign a staff person to monitor the progress of program graduates. Measurement should focus on job placement or failure to obtain employment for each participant and on the percentage of program graduates still employed at 3-, 6-, and 9-month intervals following initial placement.

Compiling accurate performance measurement data is valuable in several ways.

- It provides guidance on how to improve the training product.
- The data provides a critical tool for raising funds from both the government and private foundations.
- The data can be used to market the program to potential employer partners and participants.

Step 13. Provide Case Management Support

Case management support for newly hired program graduates has a significant impact on job retention success. However, case management must be available prior to the training to help individuals develop the confidence they need to make the transition from assistance to self-sufficiency.

One-on-one support is important to the client, but weekly support groups for those just making the transition into employment or for those still searching is a proven national Best Practice in case management. These support groups offer participants the opportunity to share achievements, frustrations and problems encountered in their new jobs with fellow pre-employment training graduates. These support groups often provide new approaches and strategies for resolving problems and barriers to job success.

National Best Practice Job Readiness Training Models

“Soft Skills” Models

- Horizons**
Women’s Employment Network
1734 East 63rd St., Suite 300
Kansas City, MO 64101
Contact: Leigh Klein
Phone: 816-822-8083
- Jobs for Youth**
50 E. Washington St.
Chicago, IL 60602
Contact: Jack Connelly
Phone: 312-782-2086
- Career Resources**
350 Fairfield Ave.
Bridgeport, CT 06604
Contact: Rina Bakalar
Phone: 203-334-5627

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- ❑ **STRIVE Central**
1820 Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10029
Contact: Dan Jusino
Phone: 212-360-1100
 - ❑ **Promised Land Employment Service**
205 Seventh St.
Rockford, IL 61104
Contact: Jeff Jones
Phone: 815-964-3491
 - ❑ **WorkNet Training Services**
P. O. Box 5582
Hacienda Heights, CA 91745
Contact: Debra Angel or Elizabeth Harney
Phone: 626-810-4447
 - “Hard Skills” Models**
 - ❑ **Wildcat Service Corporation**
61 Hudson St.
New York, NY 10013
Contact: Margie Torres
Phone: 212- 219-9700 ext. 5017
 - ❑ **Center for Employment Training (CET)**
701 Vine St.
San Jose, CA 95110
Contact: Russ Tershey
Phone: 408-287-7924
 - ❑ **YMCA Training, Inc., Atlanta**
528 Merritts Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30313
Contact: Kaamel Nuri
Phone: 404-876-5694
 - ❑ **America Works**
575 Eighth Ave., 14th Floor
New York, NY 10018
Contact: Richard Greenwald
Phone: 212-244-5627 ext. 143
 - ❑ **Pathways to Independence**
Marriott Hotels International Community
and Employment Training Program Department
1 Marriott Dr., Department 935.47
Washington, DC 20058
Contact: Alan Brown
Phone: 800-638-8108 ext. 88586

