



Boot Camp Project Narrative: Team Louisville, Kentucky

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



Team Louisville, Kentucky Participants

- **De'Andrea Halcomb (Lead)**, Kentucky Community and Technical College System
- **Kitty Zachery**, Coalition for Workforce Diversity
- **Jenny Lampton**, MRC, CRC, Kentucky Career Center/Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- **Pam Miller**, American Red Cross
- **Keesha Gardner**, St. John Center for Homeless Men
- **Matt Martin**, Ashland Community Technical College
- **Katrina Johansen**, KentuckianaWorks
- **Jennifer Hickman**, KentuckianaWorks
- **Yvonne Jones**, KentuckianaWorks

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 Challenge Statement

1. "Some employer attitudes about those with disabilities are not positive and they result in difficulty with recognizing those with disabilities can be viable and productive candidates for the workforce."
2. "There is great demand for workers in industries that post full-time position openings which may not meet the needs of disabled jobseekers needing schedule flexibility."
3. "Lack of funding would impede some options, such as marketing expenses, but it would not be detrimental to other options that could focus on changing current strategies or involve reallocation of current funds."

SWOT Analysis

The team identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats pertaining to their challenge statement. They found that their strengths lie in existing relationships with partners, including the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, while their weaknesses include their lack of Kentucky Career Center representatives in the Boot Camp group. Further, they identified strong demand for workers and existing communication channels as opportunities, as well as lack of transportation and employer biases as threats.

Refined Challenge Statement

Collaborate with the Business Development Team at the Kentucky Career Centers to engage employers in the value of hiring individuals with disabilities.

Key Stakeholders

Kentucky Service Centers in the Louisville area; Coalition for Workforce Diversity; local employers.



Building Empathy

Experience Highlights

The team learned about the benefits and techniques for building empathy to get inspired by the employers they hope to serve. The interview technique enabled the team to listen to employers to get new ideas about how to design for them. 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. The team interviewed the business services representatives (BSRs) at the business services representatives (BSRs) at the four Kentucky Service Centers in the Louisville area using a pre-defined list of questions. The team realized that there is already great work being done at Kentucky Career Centers, and the question is now how to amplify and build on the current work being done. The team agreed to include empathy building as a practice going forward to consistently listen to employers' needs.

Results

Organizations Interviewed

Interviewed the business services representatives (BSRs) at the four Kentucky Service Centers in the Louisville area.

Key Insights

1. Lack of transparency across service providers is a challenge.
2. The team can leverage the Coalition for Workforce Diversity to jumpstart their efforts.
3. Co-enrollment can be a great opportunity for bolstering this work.
4. There is a lack of real metrics on business engagement for IWDs, so it is hard to measure success.
5. Want to ensure that the team is working with organizations that are directly working with job seekers.

Final Challenge 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 the Coalition for Workforce Diversity Committee increase employment of individuals with disabilities through awareness and use of resources available for both businesses and individuals?”

Identifying a Solution

Experience Highlights

As the team conducted empathy building and convened, potential solutions were identified. As they were identifying solutions, the team realized that they had so many great ideas that they wanted to see through. Building on their idea to leverage the existing coalition, the team ultimately selected to try to create a subcommittee on the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, since the team wants to pursue various initiatives past the duration of the Boot Camp. As such, the team shifted to building out a pitch for what the subcommittee would do and which ideas it would champion. Notably, the team also participated in a peer session with other grantees to further talk through promising practices and challenges.

Results

Potential Solutions Identified

1. Create a subcommittee to the Coalition for Workforce Diversity, which would ensure collaboration among key partners around hiring individuals with disabilities.
2. Create and promote materials and resources that would educate key stakeholders on hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities.
3. Collaborate with key stakeholders to create and sustain key metrics on business engagement for hiring individuals with disabilities.

Chosen Solution to Prototype

The Educational subcommittee was chosen as education is part of the Coalition for Workforce Diversity’s mission and has been done on a less formal and as needed basis during its ten years in existence. As a networking group with close to 500 local partners that gathers both employers and service providers monthly, the Coalition also maintains a website, YouTube channel, and Facebook account that can be used to disseminate educational materials.



Prototyping Solution

Experience Highlights

Kitty Zachery, the current executive director of the Coalition, has agreed to spearhead this prototype, laying out the definition of how the committee will operate, what it will do, and who will serve on it.

Results

Prototype: *The Disability Employment Boot Camp Team formed in October 2020 first focused on the idea of how to better collaborate with the Business Services team from the Career Centers to convey the value of hiring Individuals with Disabilities (IWD). As our meetings progressed, and we interviewed the individual players, our purpose shifted to how might we better educate all of the members of our community about the service organizations that benefit Individuals with Disabilities in order to increase collaboration and employment opportunity. Our solution (prototype for now) is that we form a committee that will be housed under a local non-profit, the Coalition for Workforce Diversity.*

The Coalition is an alliance of companies and individuals working together create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In existence for over ten years, the Coalition holds monthly networking meetings between employers, service providers and other community partners with a commitment to its mission. By locating the services under this organization, we have an avenue for distribution of materials that will assist all Coalition partners. After receiving Disability Employment Boot Camp team member input and approval, the proposal below is presented for approval to the Board of Directors of the Coalition.

Testing and Refining the Prototype

Experience Highlights:

During this stage of the process, the team discussed programs to be presented, audiences for the programs, and topics to be covered. The first three programs will be informational sessions on Vocational Rehabilitation, the Career Centers, and Accommodations. While the programs will be presented by the Coalition, committee members from the respective organizations will be the subject matter experts relied upon for information.

Results:

Educational Committee of the Coalition for Workforce Diversity

The Educational Committee will be a standing committee with one-year terms made up of volunteers from the coalition. The goal of the committee will be to provide educational programs that support and encourage the creation of employment opportunities for people of all abilities. At a minimum, it will always have a composition consisting of the Coalition Director and at least one representative from the following groups:

- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Kentucky Career Center/KentuckianaWorks
- Educational representative
- Coalition Employer
- Coalition Member from the Board of Directors

The initial committee will be made up of the following individuals:

- Kitty Zachery, Coalition for Workforce Diversity; Jenny Lampton, MRC, CRC, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation; Katrina Johansen, Kentucky Career Center; Jennifer Hickman, KentuckianaWorks; Ovaltine Jones, Kentuckiana Works; Jimmy Kidd, Jefferson Community and Technical College, and Kim Nelson, Supported Employment Alliance.

The committee will meet monthly at 3:00 pm the third Thursday of the month. As part of its mission, the educational committee will select topics and arrange speakers for a series of six educational session each year, presented every other month. These sessions will be presented virtually for the time being and possibly in person in the future. The committee meetings will start in May of 2021 and the first educational session will be held in July. As part of the educational process, the sessions would be taped and available on the Coalition's You-Tube channel. Informational materials would also be available either through the Coalition's website or by request for anyone who could not attend the presentation.

A tentative list of topics for 2021 are:

July – The Role of Vocational Rehabilitation

This training will be an overview of Vocational Rehabilitation as a partner within the Career Center as well as how VR can provide support to eligible individuals through services related to employment. Topics within the training will include the structure of the organization, the referral process, eligibility, individual employment planning, and the process at large.

September – The Kentucky Career Center

This will be a presentation by the local workforce investment board operator, Regan Wann on the programs available to the community at large and how individuals with disabilities could use them.

November – Job Accommodations

This session would look at the issue of accommodations from both the employer and the job seekers perspectives and share resources about accommodations.

Outlining Next Steps

Experience Highlights:

Finally, the committee met to flesh out the details of the individual workshops and to clarify next steps it would complete and to refine this document.

Results

July – The Role of Vocational Rehabilitation

- Jennifer (Jenny) Lampton would be willing to take the lead on this and build a team to create it.
- Primary audience will be Career Center staff and interested employers, service providers and community partners of the Coalition.
- Overview of Vocational Rehabilitation as a partner within the Career Center as well as how VR can provide support to eligible individuals through services related to employment. Topics within the training will include the structure of the organization, the referral process, eligibility, individual employment planning, and the process at large.

September – The Kentucky Career Center

- Katrina Johansen will take the lead.
- Regan Wann, One Stop Operator for KentuckianaWorks will present on the various workforce initiatives in our area and how they serve individuals with disabilities.
- Primary audience will be Vocational Rehabilitation staff, Coalition employers, service providers, community partners, and KentuckianaWorks stakeholders.
- Provide updated information about the KCC's move to new location and availability of services at various locations.
- Opportunity to create an overview of how KCC's and VR could collaborate to help individuals find employment and businesses find talent.

November – Job Accommodations

- Kitty and Jenny will co-lead, and work with Carol Weber
- Addressing the importance of individuals being willing to acknowledge (self-identify) their disability and be eligible to receive accommodations.
 - ◊ Often this is a conversation that does not happen – missed opportunity.
 - ◊ How to request accommodations.
- Addressing the employer's considerations and role in having the conversation and providing accommodations.
 - ◊ How to ask an employee if they could use accommodations.
 - ◊ What can an employer ask in an interview or of an existing employee?
 - ◊ Identifying the myths and barriers presented and use this as an opportunity to dispel them and address them.
 - ◊ Assume that employers are coming from a good place and need educated.



- Cover the various types of disabilities and accommodations to address them.
 - ◊ Services and supports that are available to employers.
 - ◊ Services and supports that are available to individuals.
- Opportunities to embrace virtual workforce practices to offer opportunities with fewer accommodations, resulting in higher productivity.
- Carol Weber, assistive technology branch, would be a great presenter.

Appendix

SWOT

Strengths

- De'Andrea: The Coalition for Workforce Diversity!
- Kitty: We have a network of individuals who care about these issues.
- Pam: We have been working pretty collaboratively as a coalition to keep each other abreast of opportunities in and around Louisville.
- Kitty: The partners who provide services communicate with one another.
- Kitty: We work with the career centers already.
- De'Andrea: We have several representatives who work with young people and in schools.
- Pam: I believe coming up with a resource that details companies who embrace diversity and inclusion within the area.

Weaknesses

- De'Andrea: If business entities are not adjusting well during the pandemic, they may be in panic mode and not as likely to assist.
- Pam: Right now, I feel we need a few more team members to fill the gaps in perspective we can include (i.e., someone from KY Career Centers).
- Kitty: HR partners are not always business decision makers.
- De'Andrea: If business entities are not adjusting well during the pandemic, they may be in panic mode and not as likely to assist.

Opportunities

- Pam: Come up with viable positions where individuals with disabilities have proven to be successful. I believe we all can come up with success stories for people we have hired or helped secure employment.
- Kitty: Strong demand for workers in Louisville.
- De'Andrea: We are all in the same storm! Dealing with this pandemic.
- Pam: Opportunities for others to join the work of the coalition and partnering in the community.
- Kitty: Existing communication channels.

Threats

- Pam: If folks with disabilities are not reaching out for assistance because of pandemic.
- Beth: Fear.
- Kitty: Many folks with disabilities are afraid to work during the pandemic.
- Pam: People we reach out to for advice and counsel are not interested in helping or providing information that might help us.
- De'Andrea: Lack of reliable transportation.
- Pam: Once we come up with ideas they are not welcomed and/or implement.