**WorkforceGPS**

**Voices of Experience**

**Boot Camp**

**Boot Camp Team**

**Marci Jasper**

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Marci Jasper: Yes, so we actually have two different agencies here in Minnesota, called state services for the blind and then vocational rehab services; and the director of state services for the blind got involved with this boot camp and pulled us in and helped to get a team together to see kind of what we could do throughout the six months and make it work.

**Boot Camp Team**

Yes, so we had a team of a couple local job service managers, I shouldn't say local, they were actually to two different job service managers from throughout the state in some smaller areas. We had a state services for the blind staff. We had myself, which was a vocational rehab services staff. For a while we had a veteran staff, a governor's workforce board staff, and we also had a data staff on our team. So it really was an interesting group of people because not all of them worked with individuals with disabilities. In fact, only a couple of us really did on a daily basis. So we really, I feel, got a lot more different sort of opinions and different sort of outlooks on things when it came to the group of people that we had.

Yeah, we had several aha moments throughout this project as we were working on developing kind of our challenge statement when we first started, we challenged ourselves to research what our DEED, our overarching agency, kind of their family tree or chart looks like.

**Challenge Focus**

We saw our challenges. Many employees are not aware of what all of our DEED counterparts do. So if a business or a customer calls, we didn't always know where to direct them. So once we started to look into this challenge, we kind of remembered how big state government is, and we weren't quite as confident that this was a project that our little team was able to really dig into and come up with a solution in six months. So we continued to meet as a team and talk about how we can really hone in on a smaller challenge that we could really work on and accomplish.

So in the last couple of years in Maine we've been focusing on improving our workforce system to support people with disabilities in their search for employment. And so this project we started looking at really the employer side; and its work we knew we wanted to do, and the boot camp became the opportunity and the push really to focus in on the work. And it also helped us get some buy-in from employers. And when we first engaged in the project, we were really focused on helping employers, hiring people with disabilities and how to reduce the barriers there and improve the unemployment rate for people with disabilities.

We had a lot of conversations about what people with disabilities need when it comes to looking for employment. And we talked about developing a toolkit for our employees to use. We realized there are several tickets already out there and that people could tap into, so we didn't really need to do that already. What we came down to was a resource sheet for our employees that specifically serve business, looking at training them on this resource sheet that is all around working with people with disabilities. As we started to prototype the resource sheet and get feedback on it from our stakeholders, we realized that the resource sheet is exactly what was needed for this project.

**Stakeholder Experience**

Yes. So the process of engaging with stakeholders really helped to guide us in the right direction. They did change over time of who we had. We added a lot more stakeholders. In the beginning the stakeholders really were internal staff, some of our community partners, staff, people with disabilities. And as we all started talking to, those stakeholders really did kind of add. We added more on -- the stakeholders we reached out to, helped us really to inform us what they knew about disability already and how they interact with business. Even our stakeholders informed us that they can feel uncomfortable talking about disability. So they just didn't talk about it unless the employer brought it up. So with a lot of this feedback, we really felt that we needed to get our stakeholders more comfortable with the topic of disability. So when that topic does come up, when they're talking to businesses, that they feel prepared and educated enough to talk about it.

So our stakeholders really were folks, first off, that were within our departments within DEED. A lot of our stakeholders serve businesses or get calls from businesses. So that's what we're really chose as our stakeholders, first and foremost. But then we also had people in the community that also work with businesses. So we had local community partners. We had local school districts that serve business. And then also, of course, people with disabilities were part of our stakeholder group.

**Boot Camp Benefits**

The biggest benefit that that we saw from engaging in the boot camp was the need for the resource sheet when it comes to education, to people on the value of employing people with disabilities. As I said earlier, the topic of disability can be very uncomfortable for people to talk about. And as we completed our empathy exercise of talking with employers about disability, this really became even more evident when we realized what we realized is that there needs to be education to businesses and people in general about employment of people with disabilities. The myths and stigmas are still very strong out there that people with disabilities either cannot work or can only work in entry level janitorial or retail type positions. Again, our team consisted of really employees throughout kind of our enterprise that that may or may not have worked with people with disabilities. So when the same messages continue to come out from employers, we knew that this resource sheet was needed and that more education really had to happen.

Another huge benefit was the team that was put together for this project. They were from all different departments. We really got a lot of different viewpoints which helped challenge our thinking and really got us to kind of a final product.

And one of the last benefits I wanted to talk about was the communication we had with other states in the boot camp. No one likes to point out their challenges that they have within the organization. But when we met with other states and found out that they were having some of those same challenges, it really made us realize that we weren't alone and we were then able to really bounce ideas off other states and work together on some solutions.

**Lessons Learned**

I really think working through this boot camp, as I talk to a lot of my team members, they're really positive things to say about it and how a lot of the exercises that we did with this boot camp that they are actually going to continue to use, like, for example, the empathy exercise with employers and really digging in and finding out when employers say something, what are they really saying? So really getting to that core. But the people on my team really, really talk highly of this and it helped them really think outside the box when we're looking at doing different sort of projects.