

Script for Employer Engagement

Slide 1:

Maisha:

Hello and welcome to Our Journey Together Summer Webcast Mini-series on Employer Engagement.

Effective employer engagement can be integral to the design, sustainability, and success of your program. In this Summer Webcast we interview Ericka Cheney & Jeermel Sylvester from EmployIndy of Indianapolis, one the Career Pathways for Youth (Summer Jobs) grantees, to discuss practices they are using to engage employers and build their capacity for providing valuable work experience opportunities.

Slide 2:

Maisha:

What practices can you share about your work with employers that can help other programs to recruit, retain, and build strong relationships?

Erika:

Thank you, Maisha. Project Indy best practices includes engaging local city officials like the mayor, connecting with local news media with the Mayor's support, leveraging connections with regional employers through our local Chamber of Commerce and a bipartisan committee made up of public-private partnership. Our partnership with the Mayor of Indianapolis, Joe Hogsett, has been key to the success of our youth jobs program, "Project Indy." Mayor Hogsett has made summer employment a priority initiative of his administration, and he and his staff have been a part of our efforts in a variety of ways. This top-down approach has helped us build on the program each year, and we are on our way to our most successful year in 2018. The attention that the Mayor's Office receives from local news stations has ensured that our earned media reach has been strong. This year at our kickoff event, we featured Mayor Hogsett and our CEO, **Angela Carr Klitzsch** speaking alongside multiple employers and participants, which provided great real-life examples of how the program has had an impact. Further helping the cause, this year the Mayor's office has invested in paid advertising on our local NPR station and signage on our city buses for recruiting employers. This year we already have 75 employers signed up on www.projectindy.net which is exciting.

Additionally, as an intermediary in the workforce development space, we have leveraged a number of our own employer contacts throughout our region, plus the Indy Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee who are both well-connected with the employer community in Indy. Though probably the biggest thing that we have going for us at this point is that we are not starting from zero - now we have a couple of years behind us, which means there are more supporters, and they have their own networks with whom they can share the message.

Jeermal:

You definitely want to find out what the employers' needs are and help them find value in providing work opportunities for young people. A big part of that is reassuring them that the young adults they hire are actually equipped to do the job. So, to help with this, EmployIndy is actually in the process of launching an employability skills curriculum called "Job Ready Indy" which will badge participants in different sections of job preparedness. For my role, I find ways to help the companies beyond employment needs, so I also inform them of the other resources we have in our workforce development ecosystem that could be of benefit to them to enhance their business. I have found that when I show them that I want what's best for their business, they tend to return the favor by hiring, speaking, or providing career exploration tours for our participants.

Slide 3:**Maisha:**

Which types of employers represent the majority in your work experience activity-- public, private, or government? Please provide some examples.

Erika:

In the past we have had a heavier emphasis on government and not-for-profit employers like Indy Parks Department and YMCA. However, this year thanks to some of the efforts I mentioned in my previous answer, plus some strong relationship development from our staff – especially Jeermal! - we have had an influx in private sector employers like Starbucks, McDonald's, Crew Car Wash, and the Sheraton hotels, which is very exciting. Our breakdown of this year's employer signups is as follows:

- Private – 69%
- Nonprofit – 22%
- Government/public – 9%

Jeermal:

The biggest thing I can say is that behind all the names of employers we work with – whether it is a nonprofit or a national brand or whatever – there is a person over there who wants to know a person over here who they can work with. Creating a positive relationship that benefits that person is what has been the most successful. That might mean helping them see ROI on hiring young adults, but it is also important that we as a workforce development board are always listening, understanding the needs of our connections, and collaborating effectively. Once I have made contact with them via email or phone, I set a time to go out and meet the employer in person so they can connect with me as a person, not just a name. Once I have made that connection, I follow-up with them on an email recounting our meeting and next steps. Recently I helped a staffing agency connect with another company that can provide call center work readiness training. Just making that connection saved them time and money, and they sent me a personal thank you note. I know that that effort has created an advocate for EmployIndy, which is all part of the bigger picture.

Slide 4:

Maisha

What feedback have you received from your employers? How have you used this feedback to improve your engagement?

Erika:

The biggest feedback we receive from employers about our youth and young adult population is that they are lacking the basic employability skills needed to succeed in their jobs. They tend to be late for their shifts, do not understand proper cell phone etiquette on the job, and have poor attendance to name a few. Over the past year, we have been working with the Indy Chamber on developing our Job Ready Indy employability skills program which Jeermal mentioned. The idea is that we can provide some of the soft skills and work readiness that may be missing from some young entry-level candidates. This sort of “lack of soft skills” is not unique to Indianapolis, it’s a national trend that we have studied – but more importantly it is what employers are telling us. And for us, it is important that employers feel like we are listening and addressing their needs.

Jeermal:

They are willing to come alongside us to provide opportunities for young people, but sometimes they have concerns. I try to help ease those fears by getting them to see the bigger picture and how providing young people with work experience can be a threefold win:

1. First, it is a win for the young person as they explore career options, gain experience, and get a paycheck – or as the kids are saying “get that bag”
2. It’s also win for the employer to get small projects complete, build up morale, and offer a leadership or management experience to whomever oversees the young workers.
3. Most importantly, it benefits the community because what’s happening is we are creating young tax paying citizens who are on a better track to support the local economy – in the end we want everyone to have the best opportunity possible to be productive, and then return the favor to the next generation of young people.

Slide 5:

Maisha

Are you partnering with national companies along with local community organizations? If so, provide some of the strategies you implemented to make these connections?

Erika:

As an organization, we very much try to have great relationships with both. I would say that through this project, we are finding ourselves extending our personal relationships deeper into the employer community than ever before. Some of our contacts don’t hire youth, but with them we are seeing how they can get involved – for mentoring, job

shadowing, resume reviews, and so on. Also, many organizations want to donate – be sure you have a system in place to accept a donation and put it to good use! Ultimately, we just try to get the point across that exposing young adults to an industry or career path can take many forms, not just through hiring.

Jeermal:

Starbucks is a good example here. As a national company, Starbucks has a strong social responsibility culture. They generally attend youth job fairs and other events that we work with, and we have developed a strong relationship. We have partnered with Starbucks locally to provide employment and career explorations opportunities for students and young adults. Last fall Starbucks partnered with Warren Township Adult Basic Education and few other local businesses to provide resume help and mock interviews for young adults on the Far East side of Indy. The event was a huge success, and now we are planning to host Health Care Career Exploration and Advanced Manufacturing event at the same location. Seeing the success we have had with an organization like Starbucks has helped us identify ways to repeat that success in other industries with other employers.

Slide 6:

Maisha

Thank you EmployIndy for sharing those great Employer Engagement Tips and thank you all for listening to Our Journey Together Summer Webcast Mini-series.