

# Business Engagement Technical Assistance Tool

for the

National Farmworker Jobs Program

**Business Engagement** is a term to describe the act of engaging businesses—often together, as a high-growth industry—to identify and ultimately solve their talent needs.

## Why Now?

Better coordination in reaching out to businesses to understand and attempt to solve their talent needs has long been a focus for regions. Now, there are even more programs and agencies that are contacting businesses for this purpose, as states and communities expand work experiences for youth and explore the inclusion of work requirements for Medicaid and SNAP recipients, as examples. The risk of frustrating businesses is now higher and can be mitigated through a more strategic and integrated approach.

## How: Three Steps

### Step 1: Do Your Homework

To effectively solve business' talent needs, you must deeply understand your business's specific demand for labor and services and your own regional economy and business climate. This is often referred to as "demand planning" describing the process by which [a grantee] collects business intelligence and labor market information to compile an accurate snapshot of the talent supply/demand picture. Here are some strategies that you can use to "do your homework":

- **Use labor market information (LMI) to get a clear picture of available labor and talent supply gaps by skillset and target industry.** It might also include the following additional data points as they compile an accurate snapshot of the talent supply/demand picture:
  - Difficult-to-fill job vacancies
  - Core competencies needed within targeted occupations
  - Overall business and economic climate
- **Conduct targeted interviews with businesses.** Business outreach experts are adept at collecting key business needs/information when meeting with businesses. By coordinating and understanding the right questions to ask, an integrated business services team ultimately minimizes touchpoints with a business limiting their "visit fatigue."
- **Crosscheck, combine, and leverage your employer lists** with community partners.
- **Find "employer champions."** Which employers keep coming back? Use them to recruit additional companies and bring them with you to new meet-and-greets.

### *Do you have the right skills to work with businesses to solve their talent needs?*

Individuals who regularly interface with businesses to identify and address talent needs ideally need to be skilled in the following areas:

- Ability to work with businesses to validate and dig deep on a variety of needs, including the business's talent needs
- Active listening
- Ability to facilitate and convene industry-wide meetings
- Understanding of which state/regional programs and services are most valued by business

## Step 2: Engage with Business and Deliver Solutions

A strong business engagement strategy builds on information learned during the demand-planning process and positions grantees to design and deliver customized and responsive solutions. Here are some strategies that you can use to “engage with business and deliver solutions”:

- **Assess opportunity and develop proposed solutions.** The focus should be on delivering solutions to the expressed business needs (*not just what your program can offer*). Your proposed solution back to the business should be a customized proposal for how your program (*and possibly others*) will address their needs.
- **Involve other partners.** Because your businesses likely have many talent needs—from entry-level to middle- and high-skill—a variety of community partners are critical to addressing this challenge. This includes education, economic development, workforce development, unions, community-based organizations, industry associations, among others. You should have an inventory of what programs and resources are available in your area. Consider pulling together a formal team of these organizations to assess what you are hearing from businesses and to put together a more comprehensive and holistic set of solutions.

Your solutions should aim to solve the business’s comprehensive or most pressing talent needs regardless of which partner ultimately provides those services. While businesses receive the solution, they may not know what organization or program ultimately delivered the solution.

- **Be clear about roles and responsibilities** of partners so employers don’t experience mixed messages, gaps, or duplication.
- **Engage employers together**, not just individually. Partners learn a lot from each other, recognize that value, and keep coming back. Look to partners working on similar issues for outreach: local, state, federal agencies, nonprofits or other community organizations, business partners, anyone who has the same “target audience” could be an effective partner.
- **Keep engagement industry-specific.** When you share about your services, put it in the context of the business audience.
- **Go to them.** Get out of the office, listen more, and sell less.
- **Run Job Fairs.** Staff utilizes this opportunity to introduce themselves to employers and their Human Resources Personnel to open the door for further contact and to understand the needs of the employers.
- **Partner with Staffing Agencies.** Employers are using staffing agencies to find employees, cut recruitment time, minimize resources, and be more cost effective; therefore, it is wise to keep in touch with all staffing agencies in the area and find out who they hire for or find out directly from the company which staffing agency is doing their hiring.
- **Network.** Membership to Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Boards, Human Resources Organizations, and other professional and industry associations is a key component to reaching employers during business and social functions.
- **Start with actual job descriptions**, but then coordinate with employers to find out what their needs are, and to establish credibility.
- **Build trust.** Your focus should be on building long-standing relationships with your business (*not just for the grant*) and know how to leverage program resources toward a more impactful solution for businesses. This allows you to

### *Tip – Advancing within Farmwork*

Create a menu of skill upgrade trainings related to the industry such as small machine or tractor repair, specialized licensing like pesticide application or commercial truck driving, and even bookkeeping and customer service that NFJP grantees could train qualified farmworkers for better positions with their current employers.

move beyond transactional services and work with businesses on innovative talent pipeline solutions including work-based learning, apprenticeships, and other recruitment, hiring, training, and transition services.

- **Speak their language.** Your messaging should be simple and articulate a common “solutions approach” avoiding lists of programs and services. Messaging should center around concepts important to businesses including how these services will impact profitability and productivity (i.e. their bottom line or what’s in it for them).
- **Dispel myths and stereotypes** and promote the individual skills of the participant.
- **Utilize employer incentives**, such as Ticket to Work, Work Opportunity Tax Credits, On-the-Job Training, etc.
- **Provide needed services.** Growers are required to employ farmworkers who have been trained in the worker protection standard and pesticide safety; many NFJP grantees can provide that training for free to workers or partner with qualified training providers. This is an important business service for growers as well as an important related assistance that improves the lives of farmworkers!
- **Let farmers know about all services.** Many NFJP career service and training grantees also provide housing services or are connected to NFJP Housing grantees or other housing assistance providers. Make sure growers know that NFJP staff are expert problem solvers who can help field workers in need of emergency or other assistance either through the ‘related assistance’ allowable through the career service grants or through partnership networks.

### Step 3: Follow-Up

Following up on your initial visits—to ensure your “solution” is working—is essential to your long-standing relationship. Ensure this follow-up is organized through a single point of contact and is done regularly.

Remember, follow-up visits are representing “the whole” (*not just your program*) when in front of a business—bring in your partner/resources to address additional issues as they arise.

## Business Engagement in Action

The Motivation Education Training (MET) in Wyoming works collaboratively with various employers across the Big Horn Basin and region-wide to assist National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) participants with job placements. By cultivating its long-standing community partnership with the Mountain Spirit Habitat for Humanity (MSHFH), MET-Wyoming developed one of its most successful employer relationships. MSHFH creates work experience positions for MET’s NFJP participants. Participants receive individual mentoring, job coaching, and soft skill development; and ultimately, these work experience positions lead to opportunities for full-time, self-sufficient employment with MSHFH or other non-profits, state agencies, and businesses. This training program and employer partnership all started with two organizations that shared a common goal – empower individuals and their families to build a better life for themselves.

To read more about successful employer engagement, click [here](#).

## More resources on business/employer engagement:

[What is Employer Engagement?](#)

[Business Engagement Collaborative on WorkforceGPS](#)

[Quality Business Services with Employer Engagement and Customized Solutions](#)

[Employer Engagement Tip Sheets](#)