

**Helping Residents Achieve  
Self-Sufficiency: How to Design and  
Deliver Career Growth and  
Advancement Assistance**

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

The guides in this series offer “how to” information on starting a center, creating programs and identifying center partners, marketing and media outreach, sustainability, funding, and much more.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based program established by HUD in 1995. Since then, more than 1,000 centers have opened throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These community learning centers provide residents of HUD insured and assisted properties with programs, activities and training promoting economic self-sufficiency.

This guide was published in 2002.

To receive copies of this publication or any others in the series, contact:

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# ***Helping Residents Achieve Self-Sufficiency: How to Design and Deliver Career Growth and Advancement Assistance***

## **Introduction**

The ultimate success of welfare reform and employment assistance for those with minimal skills or work history will not be determined by how many people find entry-level jobs, but by how many of those jobs lead to careers and self-sufficiency. Strategies that combine education and job-skill training with work offer the most effective method for giving new workers the tools they need to move onto a career ladder and achieve upward mobility.

Neighborhood Networks centers can play a key role in these efforts by emphasizing to employers the benefits that additional training can bring to their workers. Centers can also promote workplace training by establishing formal referral and hiring relationships with specific companies in exchange for career advancement and training opportunities for new workers.

This guide describes how Neighborhood Networks centers can assist residents, center staff, and local partners in identifying and connecting with individual companies, specific industries, and occupations that offer new workers career advancement opportunities and incentives.

Other guides in this series include:

- How to Design and Deliver an Effective Employment Program.
- How to Design and Deliver an Effective Job Readiness Program.
- How to Design and Deliver an Effective Job Development and Placement Program.
- How to Design and Deliver Effective Follow-up Retention Services.

This guide presents an eight-step approach to career growth and advancement assistance. It shows centers how to:

- Step 1: Provide career guidance to jobseekers during the job search phase.
- Step 2: Use transitional employment as a career development tool for the hard-to-place.
- Step 3: Target industries, employers, and occupations that offer the best career growth.
- Step 4: Market to employers the benefits of providing onsite education and training.
- Step 5: Encourage employers to promote learning both at and away from the workplace.
- Step 6: Identify government funding for companies to provide training to new workers.
- Step 7: Urge state and local municipalities to promote career advancement to employers.
- Step 8: Encourage jobseekers to become smarter “job switchers.”

Neighborhood Networks centers can use this guide in different ways, depending on their staff resources and how they deliver employment services. They can partner with other service providers to engage in discussion with employers regarding career advancement issues, or they can approach businesses directly and collaborate with them to obtain training and career opportunities for center participants.

**Partner with service providers and business organizations, and/or collaborate with employers.** The labor-intensive requirement of engaging businesses in discussions regarding worker training means that this should be the first option. Be aware that employers are the key to career advancement opportunities for new workers. Without business participation, it will not happen. Centers should approach business entities to act as partners. Centers should also use the local workforce investment board or private industry council as an information resource for onsite training programs, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or literacy classes funded by local, state, or federal funds.

**Provide direct assistance.** For centers that choose to provide direct career advancement assistance, this guide identifies effective approaches and strategies to help new workers achieve upward mobility.

## **Eight Steps to Providing Career Growth and Advancement Assistance**

### **Step 1. Provide Career Guidance to Jobseekers During the Job Search Phase**

Career growth and advancement issues should be addressed during the job search phase of the resident's transition into the workplace. Neighborhood Networks centers should encourage their own or outside job developers and case managers to be selective when referring residents to companies for job interviews. While decisions about job referrals should be based primarily on employment availability, salary, and benefits, career advancement opportunities should also be considered.

Some questions that should be raised to an employer include:

- Is there worker access to education and training onsite or outside of work?
- Are new employees offered tuition reimbursement, paid time off, bonuses, or other incentives to obtain further training?
- Is onsite training in advanced vocational skills, General Equivalency Degree (GED), or ESOL classes offered?
- Is there a formal schedule of salary increases and promotions for employees based on regular performance evaluations?

Neighborhood Networks centers should refer residents to local employers who offer career advancement opportunities. If employers do not offer these options, centers should explain the benefits of increased productivity and retention that occur when training is provided to entry-level employees.

### **Step 2. Use Transitional Employment as a Career Development Tool for the Hard-to-Place**

Community work experience, subsidized employment, and temporary employment agency placement are all effective career development strategies for individuals with multiple barriers to employment. These placements are especially effective when combined with education and training. When offered in a mentor-supported work environment, this type of work can motivate individuals and give them the confidence needed to make a successful transition to employment and self-sufficiency.

To aid career development, Neighborhood Networks centers should:

- **Use nonprofit providers and public-sector groups as an information resource.** Partner with one of these groups to identify the most effective subsidized employment options in either the local public or private sector. Local government agencies and business organizations often have community service jobs for disadvantaged individuals. Look for opportunities that will help residents develop marketable job skills.

- **Consider using temporary agencies as training/placement providers.** Increasingly, temporary firms provide an effective springboard into the workplace for new workers with limited skills or work experience. Temporary work is often the best way for jobseekers with previous job problems to develop transferable skills, build a sustained work history, and obtain positive work references.
- **Ensure that work meets employer standards.** Before referring residents for jobs, centers should ensure that the specific work to be performed is essential to the company's bottom line and not marginal, make-work tasks. Check with the local welfare agency to make sure work activities meet the state's requirements under its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) rules.
- **Use transitional jobs to promote community quality of life.** When exploring community service jobs for residents, consider projects that provide participants with marketable skills in addition to allowing them to perform work that improves the local community. Examples might include increasing the capacity of local childcare, youth, or eldercare programs.
- **Ensure that jobs combine skill acquisition with education and career guidance.** Strive to improve the quality of transitional employment by encouraging workplaces to provide employees with career guidance, work-related instruction, education credentials, and/or credits for postsecondary education courses.

### **Step 3. Target Industries, Employers, and Occupations That Offer the Best Career Growth**

To help residents make a successful transition to employment and start on a career track, identify the most promising local jobs and employers. Various local sources provide this type of labor market information. First, assemble the data. Then, advise residents.

Follow this process:

- **Assess companies and industries.** To evaluate industries, occupations, and employers for the best career growth, research:
  - The number of entry-level jobs filled annually and determine whether the number has increased or decreased in the past 3 years. A significant drop may mean the company is phasing out those jobs.
  - The retention rate of new workers at 6 and 12 months. Compare the company's retention rate with other companies in the same industry. High retention is a good sign; low retention may mean that it is not a great place to work.
  - The starting salary, benefits, tuition reimbursement, and opportunities for new workers to be promoted.
  - The availability of in-house, advanced training for incumbent workers.

Sources for this data include the local workforce investment board, chamber of commerce or business organization, state department of labor, or business school or department of a local university or community college.

- **Focus on industries that get high marks for assessment.** Industries identified by most national labor market data as having the greatest job growth in the next decade include healthcare, hospitality/entertainment/tourism, retail sales (including floor and remote sales/call centers), and back office/administrative. Growth industries will vary by region.
- **Partner with labor unions or large employers.** Unions usually have links with companies that have numerous nontechnical jobs and offer the best benefits and career growth potential. Neighborhood Networks centers should also consider contacting a large local employer that has a high number of entry-level jobs available and has trouble filling them.

- **Identify and establish labor niche programs.** A widely used best practice for linking low-skill workers with good jobs and career advancement is to establish a sole provider agreement with a large employer. Neighborhood Networks centers would be responsible for referring a steady stream of job-ready workers in exchange for a commitment from the employer to provide advanced skills training and career opportunities.

#### **Step 4. Market to Employers the Benefits of Providing Onsite Education and Training**

In discussions with local employers, Neighborhood Networks centers should point out that providing advanced training and career advancement opportunities to new workers is mutually beneficial to the employer and the employee.

Some benefits include:

- **Career advancement opportunities provide a retention incentive.** Research among welfare-to-work clients indicates companies that provide training and career opportunities boast a retention rate as high, or higher, than companies that hire entry-level employees who do not have employment barriers. Some specific examples:
  - **Borg-Warner Protective Services:** In an industry with a typical retention rate of less than 50 percent, Borg-Warner reports a 77-percent rate for welfare hires. The company actively promotes former welfare recipients into positions of increased responsibility and pay.
  - **Giant Food, Inc.:** This supermarket chain has a 90-day retention rate for 79 percent of its welfare employees. This exceeds the 50-percent companywide retention rate. Giant attributes the excellent retention rate to a quality training program, job coaching, and opportunities for advancement.

- **Beverly Healthcare-Manhattan.** This company has a 65-percent retention rate after 6 months for welfare-to-work clients, which is equal to that of other new hires. New hires participate in a 2½-week, in-house certified nursing assistant training program.

- **New workers with upgraded skills mean higher company productivity and profits.** Neighborhood Networks centers should remind small employers of this fact. Often, small companies focus on the upfront cost of training and dismiss the outcomes. By increasing the skills of entry-level workers, businesses can promote workers to more responsible positions, thereby creating new openings at the entry-level. This results in company growth, which is the goal of every small business.

#### **Step 5. Encourage Employers to Promote Learning Both At and Away From the Workplace**

Small and mid-sized employers are often reluctant to provide training and education for workers onsite because of out-of-pocket costs, lost staff time, and production downtime. To overcome these issues, Neighborhood Networks centers can provide businesses with sources of free onsite training and support services for workers who want to continue their education.

- **Identify local organizations that provide workplace training.** Check the local adult literacy chapter and continuing education classes offered by the school system. These groups generally offer free GED, ESOL, and customer service classes at the work site. Service providers also offer various skills training programs to disadvantaged workers and welfare recipients who are transitioning into employment.
- **Identify support services for new workers who want to take classes after hours.** Childcare and transportation are the most common barriers preventing new workers from improving their skills and continuing their education. Public-sector agencies often provide van transportation or public

transportation vouchers for low-income or unemployed individuals who want to pursue their education at night or on weekends.

- **Provide employers with information about Individual Development Accounts (IDAs).** This is a federal-state program designed to help low-income workers set aside funds that are then matched by employers to finance additional education and training. Twenty-seven states permit TANF recipients to establish IDAs. For more information, contact the local office of the U.S. Department of Labor.
- **Encourage employers to use a job-profiling system for new workers.** A highly effective method for determining what kind of training entry-level workers need for promotion is a skills assessment system that identifies core skills. Work Keys is one job-profiling tool widely used by employers. A few states use these job-profiling assessments with high school seniors.

#### **Step 6. Identify Government Funding for Companies to Provide Training to New Workers**

Small and mid-sized employers are more likely to provide training to entry-level employees if they can defray some of the costs. Neighborhood Networks centers can provide employers with this kind of information.

- **Federal and state training funds available for employers.** These programs provide partial reimbursement to employers to cover training of entry-level workers:
  - **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** This is a federally funded program that permits employers to claim reimbursement of up to 50 percent of wages paid to entry-level workers during the first 9 months of employment.
  - **Work Opportunity Tax Credit:** This is similar to the OJT program in the amount of employer reimbursement claimed for wages paid to entry-level workers. Workers must meet the eligibility criteria

for a disadvantaged adult under the Job Training Partnership Act.

- **Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit:** This program applies only to TANF-eligible individuals, but it provides similar reimbursement of wages to employers.

Check with your local/state department of labor or department of economic development for other training reimbursement programs for disadvantaged or low-income workers.

- **State customized training programs for incumbent workers.** Except for Montana and New Hampshire, all other states have customized training programs to meet the needs of specific firms or industries. These programs typically feature 50-50 matches by the state and the employer. These programs are intended to help new or expanding businesses remain competitive by developing the skills of newly hired workers or upgrading the skills of incumbent workers.
- **Explore the possibility of industry-specific consortia training programs.** There are public-private collaborations that establish specific training programs to generate workers with required skills in order to meet a specific labor need by a local industry. Examples might include a local banking industry that establishes a generic bank teller training program or hotel/retail industries with customer service call center outlets that collaborate to establish a training center.

#### **Step 7. Urge States and Local Municipalities to Promote Career Advancement to Employers**

State and local municipalities need to develop strategies that encourage employers to provide onsite education and training to help new workers attain the marketable skills they need to increase their wages and ultimately become self-sufficient. Neighborhood Networks centers should try to facilitate discussions with state and local officials about providing incentives to employers that offer additional training upgrades for incumbent



workers. Issues to be raised with these officials should include:

- **Changing the design of job skill development programs to complement “Work First” welfare programs.** Residents with multiple barriers to employment need substantial pre-employment training and transitional work experience before they move into permanent employment. Placing these clients before they are ready to handle the professional and personal pressures of a job often results in failure—they quit or are fired—and the experience lowers their self-esteem and motivation to try to change their situation.
- **Ensuring that pre-employment training is linked to postplacement training.** Establish training and job linkages with local employers to provide them with a reliable source of entry-level workers in exchange for a commitment that centers provide ongoing training after workers are hired and have demonstrated a strong work ethic.
- **Establishing “first source agreements” with employers.** First source agreements involve employers that benefit from Community Development Block Grant, public housing funds, or other public funding. Under these agreements, employers who receive these types of funding agree to give hiring preference to local residents who want to work. The agreement also gives employers a reliable, inexpensive system for locating quality employees. Government officials should be encouraged to raise the issue of providing onsite training for new workers with employers.

All of these employment linkage programs have some common features, including:

- Offering incentives, such as low-cost loans, tax abatements, and zoning variances, as inducements for employers to establish a hiring preference.

- Providing community providers with timely access to job opportunities for their clients.
- Developing agreements between community providers and employers on establishing formal mechanisms for screening, referring, and placing job candidates and providing postemployment training.
- A record of demonstrating greater impact in placing individuals with limited work histories and multiple personal barriers. Linkage programs in Berkeley, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Portland, Oregon place minorities in jobs at two to three times their overall representation in the workforce.

### **Step 8. Encourage Jobseekers to Become Smarter Job Switchers**

Neighborhood Networks centers should urge residents to understand how to apply their skills across industries and occupations so they can make better decisions about improving their opportunities for career advancement. Here are some suggestions:

- **Provide seminars and workshops on effective job switching.** Entry-level and low-income workers are often poorly informed about how to use their job skills to find better jobs in industries with career advancement. Budget permitting, Neighborhood Networks centers should invite employment experts to advise residents on how to leverage the value of their job skills to obtain better employment. Another option is to check with local employment search firms to see if they would provide pro bono seminars for residents.
- **Establish resource rooms for residents who are seeking new employment.** This kind of support is crucial to residents seeking better data on jobs and industries that provide advanced training and career growth. If possible, Neighborhood Networks centers should provide computers with Internet capability because this provides access to local, regional, and national job bank listings.

If centers do not have the space or the budget for this type of support, contact the local library and assist residents in signing up for time on the Internet.

- **Provide intensive case management about the do's and don'ts of job switching.** New workers often are unsure about when to change jobs. Neighborhood Networks centers can provide valuable advice by having discussions and workshops that recommend to residents when to seek new employment. Points to emphasize include:

- **Importance of skills acquisition over salary.** When starting out, new workers should place more importance on a company that offers consistent skills upgrade training and less importance on starting salaries. When employers hire, they place more importance on a job candidate's skills than previous salary. Future career advancement also is based more on what someone knows than how much they earn.
- **Job-hopping creates a negative impression.** Another reason for avoiding chronic job switching is the spotty job history it creates. Employers look for reliability and stability when hiring. Someone who switches jobs every 3 months, regardless of the reason, creates a negative impression.
- **Develop long-term career goals and strategies to achieve them.** New workers need to understand the rules of the road to advancement, no matter where they work. Advise them about common themes for getting ahead. Here are some common themes to consider while working on career growth and advancement:

- ✧ Identify a career goal and a timeline for achieving it. Example: to be promoted to supervisor within 12 to 18 months.
- ✧ Perform one's current duties at a rate of 110 percent. In other words, try to exceed the expectation of the job assignment at every opportunity.
- ✧ Find a strong professional mentor within the company and ask him/her for advice in achieving career goals.
- ✧ Demonstrate an ability to perform the position for which you want to be promoted.
- ✧ Volunteer for extra assignments at every opportunity.
- ✧ Always perform the boss' priorities first, then your own.

- **Provide outside expert mentors for residents.** Invite representatives with expertise in occupations or industries to speak to residents. Various business organizations, such as the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), provide current or former business executives to speak to groups about career development. Have a resident who has achieved success or recognition in a particular industry speak to residents.

## **Career Training and Advancement Programs for Entry-Level Workers**

- **Salomon Smith Barney, New York City**, partnered with Wildcat Service Corporation to create a tailored training program that provides 16 weeks of skills training combined with the on-the-job experience of a paid internship.

Contact: Barbara Silvan  
(212) 816-2524

- **Borg-Warner Protective Services, Morristown, New Jersey**, provides former welfare recipients with 26 weeks of industry training. In most cases, it provides an additional 24 hours of training to allow employees to qualify for state licenses that give trainees a foothold in the security industry.

Contact: Christine Hirschl-Thayer  
(973) 397-2000

- **United Parcel Service, Atlanta, Georgia**, hired more than 10,000 welfare recipients from 1997 to 1999 and boasted a retention rate of 88 percent through the first 6 weeks of employment. An essential part of its retention program is an in-house training program, extended from 5 days to 6 weeks, and an active promotion track.

Contact: Rodney Carroll  
(202) 955-3005

- **Xerox Business Services, Rochester, New York**, has a national welfare-to-work program that provides trainees with a week of onsite orientation before 6 weeks of job shadowing a seasoned account associate. Xerox encourages new employees to develop new skills critical to advancement through the company and within the industry. Xerox is developing a curriculum, in conjunction with a local community college, to provide employees with advanced skills that lead to a career in the document industry.

Contact: Joe Hammill  
(716) 264-5372

# Neighborhood Networks Information

For more information about Neighborhood Networks, visit the Web site at [www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org](http://www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org) or contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll-free at (888) 312-2743, or TTY at (800) 483-2209. The Web site contains valuable information for centers including:

## Databases

- **Centers**  
Information about operating centers and those in planning stages. Neighborhood Networks centers across the United States are listed geographically by state.
- **News**  
Articles, press releases, success stories, and grand openings relevant to Neighborhood Networks.
- **Properties**  
Information about Neighborhood Networks properties, listed geographically by state.
- **Resources**  
Information about funding, technical assistance, publications, and Web site resources.

## Lists

- **Conferences**  
Calendar of conferences and training events.
- **Consortia**  
List of Neighborhood Networks consortia.
- **Coordinators**  
List of Neighborhood Networks coordinators.

- **Resident Associations**  
List of Neighborhood Networks properties with active resident associations.
- **Senior Properties**  
List of senior properties with operational Neighborhood Networks centers.

## Online Networking

Talk with Neighborhood Networks staff and stakeholders via online networking.

## Publications

- **Fact sheets.** Fact sheets are one-page summaries of various topics relevant to the operations of Neighborhood Network centers. Fact sheets currently available include an overview of the initiative, telehealth programs, health information, health partnerships, childcare, transportation, seniors, and community improvements at Neighborhood Network centers.
- **Network News** (current and past issues). A quarterly newsletter that highlights national achievements for a wide audience, including partners and the public.
- **NNewsline** (current and past issues). A quarterly newsletter that highlights topics of interest to Neighborhood Networks centers and coordinators.