

BUILDING BRIDGES

TO BETTER CONNECT EMPLOYERS AND PROVIDERS OF SERVICES TO JOBSEEKERS WITH DISABILITIES

*Report of a Convening Hosted by the
Employability Advisory Board of the
National Organization on Disability*

November 27, 2007, New York City

Facilitated and Reported by Basil J. Whiting, Senior Advisor, NOD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CONVENING AND ITS BACKGROUND:

In 2006-7, the National Organization on Disability (NOD) conducted research that found a fundamental disconnect in the labor market between most employers and most providers of job training and placement services for persons with disabilities (PWDs). The best of both were making great strides in preparing, placing, hiring, and making productive use of PWDs. But the bulk of both were locked into outdated ways of thinking and acting that denied PWDs employment and denied employers their productive services.

To begin dealing with this disconnect, NOD convened a small group of leading employers and providers of employment services for PWDs to identify practical strategies and specific projects for employers and providers to work on together to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

The Convening was held on November 27, 2007, in New York City, and attended by senior executives from six large and small employers, nine providers, NOD, and the Henry H. Kessler Foundation, a major funder of NOD.¹ The dialogue of the group was open, candid, and freewheeling.

KEY INSIGHTS AND ISSUES DISCUSSED

- **Not Self-Identifying as Having a Disability:** Many PWDs see no advantage to so doing and fear being stigmatized if they do. Employers noted that the lack of self-identification hampered their efforts to recruit and hire PWDs or to find and promote incumbent employees with disabilities.
- **Difficulty Finding Applicants with Disabilities for High Level Positions:** Employers use search firms for such “elevated” positions, which, however, have little experience finding candidates with disabilities for them. Further, while there are organizations of professional women or minorities promoting their advancement there are none for managers or professionals with disabilities.
- **Employer Issues: Creating a Welcoming Culture from Top to Bottom**
 - Employers must create a culture from top to bottom that is welcoming of PWDs and reflects firmly held expectations and convictions that PWDs could do the job for which hired. This was seen as a continuing challenge. “For every manager who embraces this, there are others who don’t.”
 - Employers noted that efforts must also be made to support the co-workers of PWDs, preparing them for accommodations that may be needed

¹ The Kessler Foundation and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. funded the Convening, for which we express our appreciation.

- Large employers with professional human resource staffs and well-developed diversity programs often do well at employing PWDs. But they were often bureaucratic and have embedded cultures resistant to PWDs. Smaller companies are often more reluctant but can be highly positive because “These ...guys really know their workers and take care of them.”
- Employers often learn best from example and from each other. Visits to facilities that had productive workforces of mainly PWDs were effective, as were case studies, videos, and other training materials.
- Employers complained that the myriad suppliers of employment services for PWDs was confusing and overburdened their time. How could they know which providers were responsive to employers’ needs? There were several calls for “one point of contact” between employers and the provider world.
- **Provider Issues: “The Problem is Ours”**
 - Providers said that many provider personnel displayed a “social worker mentality,” viewing employers as “the enemy,” doubted that PWDs could be effective employees, and produced a sense of “dependency” among PWDs.
 - Providers need a “dual customer” mentality, seeing both clients and employers as customers whose needs must be understood and met. Providers should hire non-social workers as job developers.
 - Job development is not a profession; there is little in the way of effective training in job development for providers to call upon.
 - Some providers noted that they were also employers, operating sheltered workshops and competitive enterprises, including temporary service agencies that prepare PWDs to move into competitive sector employment.
- **Veterans Issues:** Most attendees were eager to devote special attention to disabled veterans returning from the Middle East wars.
- **Issues of National Policy:** Attendees noted that there were profound contradictions and disincentives in national policy that were major impediments to the greater employment of PWDs, but these were not the subjects of this Convening.

ACTION PROPOSALS:

- **A “SWAT Team” of Participants and Others**
 - A Major Local Demonstration: This idea generated considerable enthusiasm. Some attending employers and providers could work together in a locality where employers planned major expansions requiring major hires, where pro-

viders had creative local subsidiaries or affiliates, and where there was creative local government, civic, and business leadership. They would pursue a comprehensive agenda of approaches to change systems and substantially expand the employment of local PWDs, thereby meeting the needs of employers, providers, and those PWDs. Ideas and “toolboxes” tested in such an initiative could be replicated subsequently in other localities. General agreement emerged that the first location to be considered for such a broad-agenda SWAT Team initiative should be Charlotte, NC, known as a “can do” city and region with outstanding business and civic leadership.

- A Broader “SWAT Team” Vision: NOD leadership later noted the potential of a broader “SWAT Team,” an “on-call” team composed of employer/provider attendees and others with relevant expertise. They would respond to requests from substantial employers with large numbers of jobs to fill, or providers striving to fill such jobs. NOD or another “neutral” broker might be the traffic cop—fielding/screening requests and calling on relevant expertise.

- **Other Initiatives**

- To provide more PWDs for “elevated” positions: Meet with a range of search firms and of associations of managerial/professional/technical personnel to explore how to better identify and advance PWDs for such positions.
- Website ideas: Create website(s) that could be a “single point of contact,” a monster.com for employers and providers where employers could list job availabilities for “elevated” positions for which they sought candidates with disabilities. Another website could identify/list national providers and local providers (by major labor market) of services to PWDs that could be relied upon for having adopted a “dual customer” orientation meant to meet both job seeker and employer needs. Or, develop a Listserve/Blog for participants in this Convening to communicate regularly and well with each other.
- Videos/case studies of outstanding practices by employers and providers in employing PWDs should be developed and promoted.
- Training for job developers: Develop, promote, and provide in-service training for job developers of providers, both on the general nature of their “profession” and on their work with PWDs.
- Leverage the natural peer infrastructure of employer associations: Explore and develop a proposal to mount a demonstration project in several localities that would place a full-time “Disability Employment Counselor” in local Chambers of Commerce and/or other local employer or management associations. This Counselor would work with providers to develop an effective dual customer orientation, train employers on how to effectively utilize the

productive potential of PWDs, and be the “single point of contact” with the provider community that employers desire.

- Temporary service agencies: One attending provider operates a well-regarded temporary service agency for PWDs that prepares them for transition to permanent employment in the regular job market.
- Providers and employers should enable key personnel to experience life in each other’s settings. This could minimally be visits and tours, but better would be one-day job shadowing or longer cross sector internships.

NEXT STEPS ON “BUILDING BRIDGES”

- **Further Meetings of the Group**: Further meetings of this group should occur after several months only to review progress on the action steps proposed.
- **Implementing Building Bridges Action Steps**: This may involve helping form a Swat Team of participants and coordinating early steps either nationally or in Charlotte—or initiating steps to implement any of the other action steps generated during the Convening.
 - NOD invites participants, individually or in combinations, to pursue action steps of their choice, keeping the NOD and the group informed of their activities so as to avoid duplication or conflicts of effort.
 - NOD expects to play a role in exploring and developing the action steps. NOD, however, is entering a period of strategic and financial planning and restructuring that will divert some of its energies for several months. In addition, now or later, NOD will need a budget for further Building Bridges work. We estimate that a year of exploration, planning, and early implementation by a half-time person of appropriate seniority, with travel, consulting, and meeting funds, could require a budget on the order of \$125,000, which would have to be raised or promised before we could commit to such a role.
- **Future Communication Among Participants**: NOD encourages bilateral or small group communications of any kind between participants in the Convening, especially as they may involve action steps. NOD agrees, however, to serve as a nexus of communication to the group as a whole. To this end, we will explore the utility of a Listserve or Blog; but at the very least we have agreed to forward to the group as a whole any e-messages from a participant intended for all participants. Please forward such messages to Basil Whiting at bazeinbkln@aol.com.

INTRODUCTION

Background: A Fundamental Disconnect

During the early planning in 2006-7 to establish an employment initiative, our planning team spoke with over 100 researchers, advocates, employers, and providers of job training and placement services to jobseekers with disabilities. Among the many things we learned was that many larger (and some smaller) companies are now engaged in active efforts to recruit more jobseekers with disabilities and successfully accommodating their needs and utilizing their full potential. These companies are responding to shortages of qualified workers and are familiar with the data showing greater retention rates, less absenteeism, and greater problem solving abilities among workers with disabilities.

We also heard from employers that they often have trouble finding a pipeline of job-ready workers with the skills they need. They report that many providers of employment and training services do not understand their labor force needs and are often staffed by rehab or social workers “with a dependency producing ethos,” rather than by human resource or job development professionals. They thus sell their clients' deficits rather than their strengths and fail to make a good business case for an employer to hire a client.

In sharp contrast, many organizations serving people with disabilities (PWDs) reported that most employers were ill-informed about the nature and potential of people with disabilities; fearful and resentful of the costs and regulatory requirements of complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); worried about excessive lateness, absenteeism, and turnover; and concerned about low productivity and an adverse impact on the morale of others in their workplaces. They needed information, technical assistance, hand-holding, and close and frequent follow-up by provider agencies from which they might reluctantly accept the placement of a person with disabilities, because “we are not physical therapists, psychologists, or social workers.”

These findings led NOD to seek ways of addressing what we believe is a fundamental disconnect in the labor market between employers and providers of job training services.

The Convening: Action Oriented

To begin this process, we convened a small group comprising employers with notable success in building a workforce more inclusive of people with disabilities, along with leading providers of employment services for jobseekers with disabilities. The purpose of all attending was to discuss this disconnect, to learn more about the needs and experiences of each other with respect to employing people with disabilities, and, especially, to identify practical strategies and specific projects for employers and providers to work on together to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

The Convening was held on November 27, 2007, at a hotel in mid-town Manhattan, New York. The group was small to encourage candor and allow all to be heard. It comprised senior executives from six large and small employers, nine providers, NOD, and the Henry H. Kessler Foundation, a major funder of NOD (see participant list at Appendix 1). The Kessler Foundation and Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. funded the Convening, for which we express our appreciation.

The dialogue of the group was open, candid, and free-wheeling, with participants discussing the problems they face; what they want, need, get, and don't get from each other; the changes that are under way in the economy and with each other; the resources they find useful; and things that could and should be done by NOD, by them in some combination, and by others.

This was not the first meeting in recent years of employers and providers of services to jobseekers with disabilities, but it was agreed that such gatherings were not common. It was also agreed that such meetings were useful in establishing personal relationships and defining important lessons for participants and others to contemplate and assimilate—not inconsequential outcomes in an arena rife with difficult challenges. Still, was noted that few previous such gatherings had resulted in consequential innovations that participants had either suggested or, in various combinations, worked subsequently to realize. That was the outcome—and considerable challenge—that this Convening set for itself and its participants.

This Report: A Participative Process

This report of the dialogue is of necessity selective. It is not a verbatim transcript, which would be possible but impractically long and disjointed. It is, rather, a synthesis of the notes of two note-takers, of the wall-charts of a third, of a digital recording of the proceedings reviewed by the author, and of the author's judgments of what was significant as informed by his colleagues at NOD.

The report opens with a brief Executive Summary, followed by this Introduction. It then summarizes the Key Insights and Issues that emerged during the morning discussion, followed by a summary of the Action Proposals that were generated in the afternoon session. A section on Next Steps closes the text, which is followed by two Appendices. The first lists the participants and their contact information. The second lists the various resources (organizations, websites, documents, etc.) that were mentioned during the discussion.

KEY INSIGHTS AND ISSUES

The discussion during the Convening was rich and filled with facts, opinions, and suggestions. Here we summarize and synthesize our sense of the key insights and issues raised by participants in the Convening. In later sections, we summarize the suggestions for potential actions and organizational and documentary resources mentioned.

The Consequences of Not Self-Identifying as Having a Disability

Many participants testified that if a disability is not readily apparent, many PWDs decline to self-identify as a PWD. Numerous participants cited examples, reasons, and consequences of this unwillingness among both students and older workers at all levels. Many PWDs lack see no advantage to identifying themselves as having a disability and fear being stigmatized by employers, fellow workers, or others if they do self-identify.

One participant noted that many women and minorities have pride in their identification, aggressively promote and pursue their rights, and belong to organizations that assist them in so doing. This is not yet similarly so with PWDs, who, one participant noted, “are comparable to the Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender community” in their fear of stigmatization. But more of the latter are coming “out of the closet” and showing pride in asserting their employment and other rights. This is only beginning, many felt, with PWDs and needs to be encouraged.

The unfortunate consequences of this reluctance include examples of students and older adults who did not seek disability services or employment at all for fear of being identified as a PWD. Others who gained employment but did not self-identify did not obtain accommodations to which they might be entitled that could both ease their work life and enhance their productivity and, therefore, their value to their employers. Further, numerous employer participants noted that the lack of self-identification hampered their efforts to recruit, and hire PWDs or to find and promote employees with disabilities as part of their aggressive diversity programs.

The Difficulty in Finding Applicants with Disabilities for High Level Positions

Early in the discussion, several employers emphasized their concern about the difficulty of finding applicants with disabilities for high-level positions—managers, professionals, technicians. “We want disabled managers, accountants, and other professionals, “ said one. “PWDs in such elevated positions not only competently fill such vacancies where candidates of any nature are in short supply, but serve as roll models to other employees both with and without disabilities.” “But where,” said another employer, “do I find an accountant with a disability? Whom can I call? No one.”

Employers noted that they can fill mid-level and lower-level positions by approaching local disability agencies (though there are issues there, see below). For such positions, the labor market is usually local. For high-level positions, however, the labor market is

of necessity regional or national. For this reason, many employers said that they use search firms, which generally find such candidates among persons already employed in such positions. But it was noted that search firms have little experience or success in finding candidates with disabilities for such “elevated” positions. There are a small number of search firms that specialize in finding PWDs with high-level experience, skills, and credentials (Bender Consulting of Pittsburgh was mentioned by more than one participant, while another cited several firms serving the financial services industry in New York City who recruit PWDs for high-level positions).

Further, participants noted that while there are organizations of professional women or minorities promoting their advancement (e.g., of women managers or African-American professionals) there are no such organizations for managers or professionals with disabilities.

Employer Issues: Creating a Welcoming Culture from Top to Bottom

As noted at the outset, most of the employers invited and attending (see Appendix I) were nationally known for their outstanding efforts and successes at employing PWDs. Nonetheless, one employer much praised by others in attendance said, “If we’re one of the best in the country, then that’s a sad commentary on this country because we have a long way to go.”

- The employers present agreed that it was imperative for employers to create a culture from top to bottom that was welcoming of PWDs and reflected firmly held expectations and convictions that PWDs could indeed do the job for which hired. As in all cultural change, top leadership had to drive the change by word and deed and by consistent reinforcement using all the rewards and incentives available to management and leadership.
- Many of the employers in the room were large, national firms with many local facilities. They noted that it was most important for the culture of inclusion to be embedded “out in the trenches” among local managers who do the hiring and are responsible for local bottom lines. This was seen as a continuing challenge. “For every manager who embraces this, there are others who don’t,” said one employer. And, as noted in other contexts of organizational cultural change, supervisory and mid-manager levels are often where change bogs down and special efforts are required.
- Employers noted that efforts must also be made to support the co-workers of PWDs, preparing them for accommodations that may be needed and for perhaps uncommon behaviors that some PWDs may display, but all the while stressing management’s commitment to hiring PWDs and expectations that PWDs can do the job.
- The differences between large and small employers occasioned specific comment contrary to what NOD had heard in its prior research. We had heard that

large employers with professional human resource staffs and well developed diversity programs did best at committing to and employing PWDs, while smaller firms were fearful of the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the cost of accommodations, low productivity, and adverse impacts on other employees and productivity.

While these general characteristics were not denied, participants quickly pointed out that large corporations were too often bureaucratic and hosts to embedded, self-reinforcing cultures resistant to welcoming PWDs. Many also pointed out experiences with smaller companies that were highly positive. “These firms are often very small and family-owned and these guys really know their workers and take care of them,” one provider said. “Once you have them on your side in employing PWDs they are very effective.”

- Employers said that they, like others, often learn best from example. Thus many were impressed by visits to others’ facilities that had highly productive workforces composed of large percentages of PWDs. While such visits were especially valuable, some participants noted that case studies, videos, and other training materials can effectively foster or reinforce the needed cultures and behaviors.
- Employers frequently complained that the myriad suppliers of employment services for PWDs, for the poor, for minorities, and for others was confusing and overburdening of their time, which was under increasing competitive pressures. How could they know which providers could be relied on to understand and be responsive to employers’ needs? (Other employers present said they could provide advice as to providers whom they had found effective.) There were several calls for “one point of contact” between employers and the provider world.²
 - Could NOD, or Voc Rehab, or someone, mount a website that could list competent providers nationally or locally, by labor market?
 - Could NOD, or someone, mount a website where firms could seek candidates with disabilities for the “elevated” positions discussed above?
 - Could Voc Rehab, a local chamber or management or other employer association, or someone else, function as a single point of contact between employers and providers in a local labor market? (Voc Rehab may aspire to this role, but employers may be more responsive to an employer or “neutral” organization playing this role.)

² Another participant, however, felt that the notion of a “single point of contact” was a chimera. What employers needed, rather, were several providers who reliably understood and served employer needs.

Provider Issues: “The Problem is Ours”

As also noted at the outset, most of the providers invited and attending (see Appendix I) were nationally known for their outstanding efforts and successes at placing PWDs that met employers’ needs.

- When queried on the barriers to successful relations between employers and providers, one provider stated firmly, “The problem is ours.” He and other providers said that too many provider personnel displayed a “social worker mentality” that variously viewed employers as “the enemy,” harbored doubts that PWDs could be effective employees (“low expectations”), and produced a sense of “dependency” among PWDs, whom they felt required support and protection rather than challenges.
- Providers needed to adopt a “dual customer” mentality and purpose, considering both clients and employers as customers whose needs must be understood and met. Most providers in the room had already adopted such a stance, and it was noted that the State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies were moving in this direction, impelled in part by a generational change in VR leadership across the country and the merits of the arguments for a dual customer approach. (It was also noted that the public job training/placement system funded by the Workforce Investment Act and operated by State and local Workforce Investment Boards and local One Stop Centers was well along in a similar shift to a dual customer focus).
- In addition, one provider noted, with others agreeing, “Don’t use social workers as ‘job developers’ to contact employers; hire people from other walks of life as job developers, especially from the private employer world.”
- One participant cautioned, however, “Job development is not a profession; you can’t get a degree in job development. It is learned on the job.” However, he further cautioned, there is little in the way of effective training in job development for providers to call upon. Another stressed, “Follow that old sales maxim—you learn what the customer—the employer—needs and you tune your product—your client—to meet that need in terms of skills and capacities. You can’t effectively sell your client as a charitable cause to a business person. You can sell the client as a productive worker.”
- Some providers noted that they were also employers, operating sheltered workshops of subsidized employment for the severely disabled, competitive enterprises that prepare PWDs to move into competitive sector employment, and temporary service agencies that also prepare PWDs for competitive sector employment.

Veterans Issues

This was not a subject of major attention at the Convening, though most seemed eager to devote special attention to disabled veterans returning from the Middle East wars. It was noted, however, that employers had difficulty in reviewing the resumes of veterans in translating their military skills into civilian equivalents. More attention to developing effective resumes was needed from providers serving veterans.

Issues of National Policy

There was general agreement that national policy issues were not on the table at this Convening. Nonetheless, it was noted that the profound contradictions and disincentives in national policy regarding the employment of PWDs were the major impediments to changing the sad fact that “less than a half percent of those on SSI or SSDI ever leave the rolls for any reason other than death.”

ACTION PROPOSALS

The distinctive contribution of this Convening was to be action projects that the participants, in various combinations and ways, could stimulate and/or undertake. Accordingly, a number of ideas for action were either explicitly placed on the table or implied by the participants' discussions.

This was an idea session. Planning how to implement the ideas proposed is a next step for NOD and for the participants.

A Major Local Demonstration by a “SWAT Team” of Participants and Others

This idea emerged gradually during the Convening, went through twists and turns, and, by adjournment, had generated such enthusiasm that it stood head and shoulders above other ideas generated. The steps to this conviction seemed to have included:

- A growing awareness among employers, and then providers, that they not only shared many goals and accomplishments but could work usefully together on a number of things, both minor and, perhaps, major.
- A growing agreement that, while there were issues best dealt with nationally, “all job development is local,” as one participant said. And, that those in the room were major players in many localities who, if they somehow concerted their efforts, could accomplish major advances in local labor markets with local providers and employers, even changes of a systemic nature.
- A key stimulant was a phase of dialogue where employers suggested that new approaches to hiring PWDs might be most successfully implemented in areas of rapid growth of new employer facilities—and listed several localities and regions where they planned considerable growth in the next year or so (these employers agreed to send the identity of some of these locations to participants). Providers then chimed in with listings of states and locations with particularly inventive local provider leaders, especially among state Voc Rehab agencies (these providers also agreed to share their sense of where some of these localities were). It was quickly apparent that several of these overlapped.
- The catalyst for the notion of a “SWAT” team was a participant who suggested that participants pick a locality where they would assemble such a team to provide training in job development to local providers on dual customer approaches stressing meeting employer needs.
- Discussion soon expanded this notion: Some attending employers and providers would work together in a locality where they had creative local subsidiaries or affiliates and where there was creative local government, civic, and business leadership. The goal would be to develop and pursue a more comprehensive agenda

of various approaches to change systems and substantially expand the employment of local PWDs, thereby meeting the needs of employers, providers, and those PWDs. Ideas tested in such an initiative, and the “toolboxes” of specific techniques they would generate, could be replicated subsequently in other localities. (This SWAT Team initiative could develop and test some of the other ideas listed below.)

- In the Convening’s final half hour, general agreement emerged that the first location to be considered for such a broad-agenda SWAT Team initiative should be Charlotte, NC, known as a “can do” city and region with outstanding business and civic leadership.

A Broader “SWAT Team” Vision

NOD leadership later noted the potential of a broader “SWAT Team” vision, an “on-call” national team composed of employer/provider attendees and other employers, providers, and experts with relevant experience with particular populations (kids, veterans, adults with cognitive disabilities, etc.) or particular industry sectors, job type, or provider agencies. They would respond to requests for assistance from substantial employers with large numbers of jobs to fill, or providers striving to fill such jobs. NOD or another “neutral” broker might play the role of traffic cop—fielding and screening requests and calling on relevant expertise. (NOD’s present “help desk” in its Emergency Preparedness Initiative is a variant of such an approach; it responds to requests from municipalities for expert assistance in planning assistance for PWDs in disaster and recovery planning.)

Other Initiatives

- To provide more candidates with disabilities for “elevated” positions: NOD (or someone else) should meet with a range of search firms and with a range of associations of managerial, professional, and technical personnel to explore how they could better identify and advance the candidacies of PWDs for such positions. (One participant stressed the importance of such an approach for Latino managers and professionals with disabilities, citing cultural restraints that sometimes restrain their assertiveness in such matters.) (See also next idea’s first bullet.)
- Website ideas: NOD (or someone else that was neither an employer nor a provider and thus a neutral, bridging organization) should explore creating website(s) that could be a “single point of contact” that would do one or more of the below:
 - Be “an e-bay for employers and providers” (or, perhaps more appropriately, a monster.com for employers and providers) where employers could list job availabilities for “elevated” (managerial, professional, technical) positions for which they sought candidates with disabilities. Early exploration

of this idea should include discussions with monster.com, which is open to ideas for serving populations in need. One participant agreed to share in writing some ideas of how a website might enable PWDs who were likely candidates for “elevated” positions to self-identify their availability and interest in being considered for such positions. Other employers expressed appreciation for the website of COSD (Career Opportunities or Students with Disabilities) (<http://www.cosdonline.org/>), which enables college students and employers interested in hiring them to connect with each other.

- Identify/list national providers and local providers (by major labor market) of services to PWDs that could be relied upon for having adopted a “dual customer” orientation meant to meet both job seeker and employer needs. (Some participants said this would require making judgments about provider quality that neither NOD nor anyone else could do without elaborate and costly assessment mechanisms. Better, they said, to just allow providers to self-identify and list themselves, providing justification for meeting key qualifications. This alone would be a useful service.)
- Develop a Listserve and/or Blog for participants in this Convening to communicate regularly and well with each other—or at least serve as a nexus of email communication within the group as a whole.
- Videos/case studies: Develop and widely promote videos and/or written case studies of outstanding practices by employers and providers in employing PWDs.
- Training for job developers: Develop, promote, and provide in-service training for job developers of providers, both on the general nature of their “profession” and on their work with PWDs. This would seek to upgrade the “profession” of job development and turn around the paradigm of provider services to a dual customer orientation. One participant said that a model for this was the Development Training Institute, a nonprofit, foundation in Baltimore supported by foundations, which had trained generations of staff for community development corporations on real estate development to renew decayed inner-city neighborhoods.
- Leverage the natural peer infrastructure of employer associations: Explore and develop a proposal to mount a demonstration project in several localities that would place a full-time “Disability Employment Counselor” in local Chambers of Commerce and/or other local employer or management associations. This Counselor would work with providers to develop an effective dual customer orientation, train employers on how to effectively utilize the productive potential of PWDs, and be the “single point of contact” with the provider community that employers desire. (There is a decade of experience with such an approach targeted on poor entry-level workers and funded by foundations and the Department of Labor. This might be adapted to disability employment.)

- Providers should explore setting up temporary service agencies: One attending provider operates a well-regarded temporary service agency for PWDs that prepares them for transition to permanent employment in the regular job market. (See resources, below.)
- Providers and employers should enable key personnel to experience life in each other's settings. This could minimally be visits and tours, but better would be one-day job shadowing or longer cross sector internships.

NEXT STEPS ON “BUILDING BRIDGES”

Further Meetings of the Group

There was general agreement that any further meetings of this group (or relevant sub-groups) should occur after several months to review any substantial progress on the action steps that had been generated during the Convening to bridge the gaps between providers and employers—and to consider further steps.

Implementing Building Bridges Action Steps

This may involve, for example, facilitating the formation of a Swat Team of participants and coordinating early steps in Charlotte—or elsewhere; meeting with search firms and advocates for professionals; commissioning videos or case studies; designing and seeking funding for a workforce development training institute on the community development model; or designing and seeking funding for a demonstration based on local employer associations.

- NOD invites participants, individually or in such combinations as they may devise, to pursue action steps of their choice, keeping the group informed of their activities (see communications, below) so as to avoid duplication or conflicts of effort.
- NOD is both the convener of this meeting and an advocate that is neither an employer nor a provider. As such it has expected to play a role in exploring certain possible action steps and the planning and perhaps coordination of at least the early implementation of some of them.
- NOD, however, is entering a period of strategic and financial planning and restructuring that will divert some of its energies for several months. In addition, at some point, NOD will need a budget for further Building Bridges work. We estimate that a year of exploration, planning, and early implementation by a half-time person of appropriate seniority, with travel, consulting, and meeting funds, could require a budget on the order of \$125,000, which would have to be raised or promised before we could commit to such a role.

Future Communication Among Participants

NOD encourages bilateral or small group communications of any kind between participants in the Convening, especially as they may involve action steps. NOD agreed, however, to serve as a nexus of communication to the group as a whole. To this end, we will explore the utility of a Listserve or Blog; but at the very least we have agreed to forward to the group as a whole any e-messages from a participant intended for all participants. Please forward such messages to Basil Whiting at bazeinbkln@aol.com.

Appendix I: Participant List

Those underlined are members of the Employability Advisory Board of NOD.

EMPLOYERS

Beth Butler, Vice President, Employment Compliance, Wachovia Corporation.

Crosby Cromwell, Manager, Disabled Market Diversity Relations, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

Tim Crow, Executive Vice President—Human Resources, Home Depot.

Randy Lewis, Senior Vice President, Walgreens.

David Morris, Chief Executive Officer, Habitat International.

Sandy Westlund-Deenihan, President and Design Engineer, Quality Float Works.

Michelle Whitehead, Senior Director, Diversity Relations, Women and Disability Markets, Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

PROVIDERS

Virginia Cruickshank, Senior Vice President, FECS Health and Human Services System.

Rex Davidson, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Greater New York & Northern New Jersey, Inc.

Mark Donovan, Vice Chairman, Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities.

George Kessinger, President & CEO, Goodwill Industries International.

Richard Leucking, Ed.D., President, TransCen, Inc.

Alan Muir, Executive Director, Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities, University of Tennessee.

Robert Rudney, Co-Chair, Disability Forum, Booz Allen Hamilton.

Claude Schrader, Director, Start on Success.

Carl Suter, Chief Executive Officer, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation.

OTHERS

The Henry H. Kessler Foundation:

Tom Martgetts, Chairman

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Charley Dey, Chairman, NOD Employability Partnership.

Mary Dolan-Hogrefe, Vice President, NOD.

Carol Glazer, Executive Director, NOD Employability Partnership.

Mark Elliott, President, Economic Mobility Corporation.

Gay Reich, NOD Board.

Basil Whiting, Senior Advisor, NOD Employability Partnership.

Appendix II: Resources

At various points during the Convening, participants mentioned various individuals, organizations, reports, websites, and other resources of potential use for those seeking to increase the employment of persons with disabilities. Our notes and subsequent input from participants reflect the following, in no particular order. Note: the below does not contain the organizations of participants in the Convening, which are in many cases substantial resources for these purposes; please also consult Appendix I for contact information on them.

1. Search Firm: Donna Walters Kozberg, President, **Lift, Inc.**
Specializing in high tech/computer job placement only - work nationally. They were a DOL New Freedom Initiative Award winner in 2002
2. Placements of PWDs (and more): Francine Tishman, President and CEO, **Abilities!**
They were a DOL New Freedom Initiative Award winner 2003.
<http://www.business-disability.com/index.aspx>
3. Search Firm: Jeff Klare, CEO, **Hire Disability Solutions.**
4. Temporary Agency for PWDs: GoodTemps, <http://www.goodwillny.org/goodTemps.aspx>. Rex Davidson, President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Greater New York & Northern New Jersey, Inc. Mr. Davidson agreed to send descriptive information on GoodTemps to participants.
5. Job Development Theory and Practice: "Working Relationships: Creating Career Opportunities for Job Seekers with Disabilities through Employer Partnerships," by Richard G. Luecking, Ellen S. Fabian, and George P. Tilson, Paul H. Brooks Publishing, Baltimore, London, Sydney, 2004. "An outstanding book on this subject in general and regarding the disabled," per Basil Whiting, facilitator.
6. A more recent and also great book from a business perspective: "Hidden Talent: How Leading Companies Hire, Retain, and Benefit From People with Disabilities, edited by Mark L. Lengnick-Hall. 2007. Each chapter covers a different company such as H-P, Dow, Sun Trust Bank. Microsoft, etc. It also includes lessons learned about hiring and retaining PWD. Recommended in an e-mail after the Convening by Elaine E. Katz, Vice President of Grant Programs and Special Initiatives, The Henry H. Kessler Foundation
7. Various Resources on Disability Employment: The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), see <http://www.aapd-dc.org/index.php>. Among other things, seek its informative and enlightening reports on European experiences with employing PWDs.
8. European Experience with Employing PWDs: Participants felt this experience in several countries was generally illuminating. Particular mention was made of publications by the Employers Forum on Disability of the United Kingdom, <http://www.employers-forum.co.uk/www/index.htm>.
9. Advocacy and Service for PWDs: American Association of Persons with Disabilities (AAPD), <http://www.aapd-dc.org/index.php>. "The largest national nonprofit cross-disability member organization in the United States..."
10. Business Benefits of Diversity: See Diversity, Inc. at <http://www.diversityinc.com/>.
11. Website for Latinos with Disabilities: The U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has awarded the World Institute on Disability (WID), based in Oakland, California, a five-year grant to establish the National Technical Assistance Center for Latinos with Disabilities living in the USA, to be called Proyecto Vision (Project Vision). See <http://www.namisc.org/newsletters/April02/ProyectoVision.htm>.