

## NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT CORP OF JAMAICA PLAIN

### BOSTON HEALTH CARE AND RESEARCH TRAINING INSTITUTE: SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT PROCESS



BayStateWorks Promising Practice Case Study

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# 1 The Need

The Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute is a partnership of 26 stakeholders dedicated to skill-building, employment, and career advancement in health care and research. The Institute's partners include eleven employers, three community colleges, ten community-based organizations (CBOs), the Boston Private Industry Council, and Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization, Inc (MASCO). The Institute is led by the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (NDC) and the Fenway Community Development Corporation (CDC), with the Mission Hill Employment Collaborative also co-leading the pre-employment work.

The Training Institute initially focused on training and education services for incumbent workers, providing multiple levels of training for entry-level employees. While providing that training to employees of many different organizations, the Institute members learned the value of creating a simplified contact process between employers and the training/coaching organizations. Within the incumbent program, specific employers are paired with specific coaching organizations, which helps to streamline communication and minimize the number of people from the Institute with whom each employer interacts.

As the incumbent training program solidified and became consistent, the Institute turned to its next goal of starting a pre-employment training program. Various community-based partners within the Institute had worked with the partner employers to place neighborhood residents previously. This meant that employers were fielding calls and resumes from multiple neighborhood organizations, increasing their workload and decreasing the probability that a neighborhood resident would be hired into a particular position. It also meant that neighborhood organizations and residents were frustrated by their inability to create a solid pipeline of workers into the Longwood Area, where most of the partnering employers are located.

The Institute decided to create a "Single Point of Contact" (SPOC) system to streamline communications and to increase the rate of neighborhood hiring. The goal of the system is to:

1. improve the visibility of qualified candidates for positions within the Longwood Medical and Academic Area;
2. improve communication between employers and neighborhood organizations regarding candidates for positions;
3. improve the ability of employers to respond to neighborhood hiring requests by creating a more transparent and streamlined system; and
4. increase the number of residents hired in health care, and in the Longwood Medical and Academic Area in particular.

# 2 The Solution

Building upon its experience on the incumbent side, Institute staff decided to create a system that would:

1. minimize the number of people each employer's Human Resources department would need be in touch with for hiring purposes;
2. ensure that the three primary neighborhoods – Fenway, Jamaica Plain, and Mission Hill – and their residents had equal access to job opportunities, regardless of the communication/contact system, and were able to advocate for their own candidates; and
3. enable the Institute staff as a whole to build a deep level of experience with the employers, without any one individual staff person having to know all employers.

Human resources staff at the employers were receiving many calls from various organizations with candidates for placement; the volume ended up meaning that it was hard to concentrate on one organization or pool of candidates, and therefore the placement rate suffered. The Institute's Employment Specialists (ES's), based at local CBOs, were trying to understand the complexity of working with many employers, and therefore did not hold deep knowledge about specific employers; rather, it was superficial knowledge. The placement rate suffered from this as well. The SPOC is designed to mitigate both of these problems.

Training Institute staff met internally to devise the system, and then met with the employers to gain feedback and tweak the design. The SPOC was initially launched in mid-spring 2004, but did not become fully operational until September 2004.

### **3 Implementation**

The SPOC is structured as follows:

One neighborhood organization per neighborhood, for a total of three agencies, is the primary contact for several specific employers. These community organizations based in the neighborhoods (Fenway CDC, Jamaica Plain NDC, and MissionWorks) are responsible for monitoring job postings, talking with human resources departments about upcoming (not yet posted) openings, and getting to know hiring managers and other HR staff well, as well as understanding the organizational culture and needs of the employers. In other words: each of the three CBOs is required to have in-depth knowledge of several employers.

On a weekly basis, the Employment Specialists from each neighborhood hold a matching meeting. Each ES brings: 1) current job postings for their employer sites and 2) resumes for candidates they are working to place. The Employment Specialists choose three to four candidates for each position from among ALL the applicants identified by the three neighborhoods. This means that the Employment Specialists recognize the benefit and importance of working collaboratively and putting the strongest candidates forward.

Once the top candidates for particular positions at specific employers are identified, the matching meeting is completed. The ES responsible for each relevant employer site then composes a cover email with short descriptions of the candidates (which come from all three neighborhoods) and an explanation of why each top candidate is qualified for the particular opening in which they are interested. There are some cases in which the candidate needs to be contacted to make sure that he/she is interested in that opening; this is done by the original ES for that person. The ES then sends the cover email and resumes to their employer contact.

At this point, the ES from the neighborhood where the top candidate receives service can follow up with the specific employer who has the resume. This is because the Employment Specialists know their clients best and can advocate for them best. The time within which the employer is contacted after receipt of resumes is tailored to the individual employers, who have requested specific communication mechanisms. In some cases this is 48 hours after submission of the resume; in other cases it is longer.

Some of the Employment Specialists also hold a weekly phone call with their employer contact, which enables the Institute to learn about upcoming job openings and to discuss the progress in interviewing and hiring candidates already referred to the employer.

## 4 Results

It took some time for the SPOC to truly take hold. Once it did, however, employers and Employment Specialists have expressed satisfaction with the system. **Equally important, the hiring rate in the Longwood Area from the program has increased dramatically in one year— from a rate of 45% of all placements in 2004 to a rate of 61% for 2005.**

## 5 Lessons

There have been three key lessons learned:

1. *Changing modes of operation takes time and persistence.* The job developer/placement process typically used in many community organizations is very focused, usually involving one-on-one employer and candidate relationships. Employer relationships are highly valued by Employment Specialists. It was difficult when the new system began for the ES to have limited contact with employers with whom they already had solid relationships. Although the system started in the spring of 2004, it was really only in August/September 2004 that the SPOC really took hold. The change took hold for two reasons: 1) at a summer retreat staff spent significant time working through the kinks in the system and discussed their hesitations in letting go; and 2) one Employment Specialist in particular from Fenway CDC led the way for the other Employment Specialists in promoting the value of working together and approaching the placements as successes for the Training Institute as a whole, and not for individual staff.
2. *Building trust and developing a team approach among the Employment Specialists is critical.* The first formulation of the SPOC was to have each ES email resumes to the ES employer contact and then to have periodic conference calls to discuss candidates. There was no provision for a formal face-to-face meeting of the ES's. As a result, it was difficult for the Employment Specialists to build the kind of trust and common understanding needed to create a successful system. Beginning in August, staff instituted the weekly matching meetings. This gave the staff a chance to discuss the candidates in-depth, review resumes and job openings, and begin to trust that working as a team could yield better results than each ES working individually with his/her partner employers.
3. *The SPOC is easier to implement with smaller employers.* One challenge the Institute is continuing to address is how to work effectively with human resources departments that include multiple recruiters. In a smaller employer, where there are only one or two

recruiters, the SPOC works more easily because only one or two HR staff are following the candidates' interviewing and hiring processes. These HR staff are very committed to the program and the SPOC system.

In larger sites, the HR contact person who works with the SPOC is also very committed; however, that person usually passes the candidate's resume to a different recruiter who specializes in a specific employment area. That recruiter, while aware of the Institute's program, is less invested in promoting Institute candidates to hiring managers. It also sometimes lengthens the recruitment time within the employer site as communication needs to occur between the hiring manager, area recruiter, SPOC contact, and Employment Specialist for the Training Institute.

Some solutions to this issue are currently being explored and implemented, including making regular presentations to all HR recruiters regarding the Institute, holding meetings with employers to discuss and address employer-specific issues, and providing employers with data on resumes sent, interviews, and hires made as a means to illustrate logjams in the hiring process.