

Transportation and Employment:

A Guide for Workforce Professionals to Help Meet Job Seekers' Transportation Needs

The purpose of this guide is to provide workforce professionals with key items they should consider and address when working with job seekers to properly assess their individual transportation needs as part of an employment search. It also describes some suggested approaches for sharing and coordinating vital transportation resources with job seekers, workforce professionals and their community based partners.

Why are transportation assessments and access to information about available transportation options so critical to job seekers' success?

Transportation can be one of the most significant barriers to employment that job seekers face. Taking the time to review each job seeker's transportation situation and needs while engaging in job placement activities will provide a realistic picture of the array of job opportunities available to them and possibly lead to higher job retention rates. It will likely also minimize some of the employment stops and starts job seekers experience such as:

- receiving a job offer but being unable to take the position because the job is not on the bus line;
- they cannot afford the on-going cost of transportation to get to the position; or,
- the transportation options do not operate during all of their scheduled work hours or meet other needs such as allowing for drop off and/or pick of children at day care.

By exploring transportation needs upfront, ideally at the initial assessment, job seekers will have a higher chance of overcoming their transportation barriers and achieving their employment goals.

Working One on One with Job Seekers to Review their Available Transportation Resources

While current employment assessment forms ask various questions about a job seekers' transportation situation, job placement staff may need to probe further depending on the answers to the key questions and specific job placement goals. A job seeker's transportation situation may not be as straightforward as it initially seems particularly when factoring in varying shift times, multiple stops (child care, educational activities, etc.), commute time and cost. Workforce staff should ask the following key questions in discussions with job seekers:

1. Do the job seeker's transportation options match transportation options within close proximity to potential employment opportunities that you are recommending?

Workforce staff should be aware of transportation options and issues surrounding major employers. They should research transportation options to and from the job seeker's residence to potential employers. Check *Knowing the Available Transportation Resources* on page four of this guidance.

2. Does the job seeker have practical and usable transportation to get to the job?

Review job seeker's current situation and the potential transportation options available to them. Don't assume that job seekers are aware of all of the resources available. Discussing the options may also let you know if they have some misconceptions or concerns about using certain services. For instance individuals may have:

- Never ridden a bus or subway and may not know how to find route information or know how to pay a fare.
- Not been aware of demand response (drop off/pick up at individuals home or central location) services that may be available.
- A vehicle but not realize that repair assistance or gas cards may be available.
- A vehicle they rely on and may not be aware that other transportation options such as public transportation may be much more cost effective and practical.

The following additional job seeker needs must be considered in light of their transportation options:

- Reasonable commute time
- Work or training schedule
- Child care drop off/pick up
- Disabilities or other health factors
- Limited English proficiency

Keeping these considerations in mind will help to avoid issues that may arise after the job seeker has started work that may prevent them from continuing the job or cause tardiness or absences.

3. Is the transportation option affordable in the short and long term? If not, what are some solutions for making transportation affordable for the job seeker?

Workforce staff should carefully review with job seekers the actual costs of a particular transportation option to see if it is viable to use in both the short and long term. For instance, there may be transportation subsidies available during a job search or during the initial weeks of employment that may end once the individual has been employed for a certain period of time. If the job seeker in this instance is using a higher cost transportation option such as a taxi during this period, they may not be able to afford using this same service after the subsidy ends. Until the first few paychecks are received, many job seekers may not have the ability to pay for transportation.

If the transportation option is not affordable, workforce staff must consider solutions to help the job seekers make the transportation affordable. Coordination with community based partners is essential to ensure comprehensive information regarding the various transportation support programs available. For instance, applicants and recipients of public assistance are eligible for

transportation assistance including financial help to cover the cost of vehicle repairs, bus tokens, etc. if the individual is required by the social services district to participate in job search or job preparation activities. Some transit companies offer reduced fare rates for certain populations.

4. *Does the job seeker know how to use the selected transportation option?*

Once the appropriate transportation option has been agreed on, workforce staff must make sure the job seeker is comfortable with and aware of how to use the service. Below are ways to help the job seeker to learn how to use the transportation option:

- Provide contact information, fact sheets, brochures, web links and protocol for ride scheduling for the transportation option. Assist the job seeker with how to read them.
- Many public transit systems have online trip calculators that allow individuals to put in specific destination information and will provide step-by-step instructions, regarding which buses or trains to take; transfers needed and estimated travel time. Staff should be familiar with these tools and guide job seekers through them.
- Various transportation providers may have staff available to assist individuals who require a higher level or more specialized services or travel training.
- Have guides for how to ride a bus available for clients that answer basic questions such as: “Do I need a token or exact change?”, how to handle transfers, how to read a bus schedule and other bus etiquette to lessen concerns/fears about riding.

5. *What is the back-up plan for transportation should the primary option fall through?*

Ideally, a job seeker will have at least one viable secondary transportation option should their primary ride fall through. Workforce staff are encouraged to remind job seekers to think about options if the primary source of transportation falls through. For example, it may be possible to get a ride from a neighbor or co-worker on a temporary basis. Some employers have very strict attendance policies and job seekers do not want to put their employment in jeopardy due to transportation issues. If time allows, workforce staff should work with the job seeker to identify and write down emergency transportation options in the event the primary option falls through, as well as if there are other changes in the primary transportation plan, such as different childcare drop off points, and weather or route changes.

Knowing the Available Transportation Resources

Workforce professionals must be aware of the various transportation services that are available in their local area to adequately assist job seekers with their individual transportation needs. Listed below are some suggestions workforce agencies can implement to help ensure information and access to transportation resources are readily available for both staff and job seekers:

- Identify a staff member who is fully trained to serve as a resource for other staff and/or job seekers on transportation options or complicated transportation questions. A staff member

may also act as a liaison to transportation agencies or participate on area transportation committees to ensure customer needs are addressed.

- Offer training opportunities for staff to learn about existing transportation options and how to use them. This could include inviting transportation representatives to speak about the services.
- Leverage the capabilities of the Welfare-to-Work Caseload Management System to include updated information on local transportation options and services.
- Include a transportation component as part of the orientation and/or job readiness workshops. Consider having Transportation Company representatives present to job seeker groups or ask them to be available on-site at certain times to meet with job seekers.
- Create an area within the office that is accessible to customers to display the local transportation resources described below.
- Coordinate with community partners to develop an inventory of local transportation services. Such inventory can be made easily accessible and created in a format that is easy to navigate and locate, such as an icon on a desktop or a link on agency websites. Local initiatives or organizations may already have a transportation inventory that could be adapted. This inventory should encompass all modes of transport and could include:

- Customer service lines
- Trip calculators
- Public transportation Schedules
- Fare prices
- Charter bus routes
- Demand-response services
- Shuttles
- Park and ride sites
- Car and van pool options
- Taxi
- Options for individuals with disabilities
- Transportation subsidies
- Vehicle loan programs
- Gas voucher program
- Vehicle modification programs
- Information on obtaining a driver's license or permit
- Solutions for offenses for driving under the influence (DUI, DWI, DWAI)

Identifying and Sharing Information Regarding Gaps in Service

Are there recurring issues that come up when staff try to place individuals at certain jobs or in certain locations due to limited transportation options? Workforce agencies are encouraged to develop a method for collecting information regarding job seeker's unmet transportation needs. This type of tangible information is important to share with community partners and will help make informed decisions about changing, expanding, or implementing new transportation service options.