Drexel
UNIVERSITY

HIRE LOCAL
STEP BY STEP

HELP
W ANTED

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WHO'S AT THE TABLE

TARGET FUNCTIONS

EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND DEVELOPMENT

GOAL

INCREASE THE NUMBER OF JOBS IN THE INSTITUTION OR WITH THE INSTITUTION'S SUPPLIERS HELD BY LOCAL RESIDENTS, USING A TARGETED RECRUITING AND HIRING INITIATIVE INCLUDING CUSTOMIZED TRAINING-THROUGH-PLACEMENT JOB TRAINING, ALONG WITH A COMMUNITY-ACCESSIBLE ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM.

INTERNAL STAFF

- Top-level leadership, including the CFO

- Leadership in the human resources division

- **Implementation staff:** a member of HR or a supervisor in a department with high turnover

- **Implementation staff:** professional staff in community outreach and engagement

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

- City, state, or regional workforce body, or philanthropic partner, for support in securing wage reimbursements

- A workforce access and training partner who can facilitate any customized job training, with experience in the community

- A well-regarded adult literacy and GED completion training agency

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GET STARTED:

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Your first step is to understand some of the employment-related metrics characterizing the community you are partnering with in a local employment strategy. If you are in a community with a low literacy level and a low high school completion rate, it will follow that many residents do not meet the most basic criteria for university job postings, which minimally are likely to require a high school diploma.

Knowing the current unemployment rate, the high school graduation rate, the average literacy level, and the neighborhood's access to technology will give your team a sense of the types of ladders you will need to build in order to help residents over these particular obstacles to employment in your institution.

IDENTIFY YOUR CONSTITUENCY

The nature of your institutional priorities, and of your institution's unique anchor mission, will determine the specifics of your implementation plan. Before you start pulling data, reach an agreement with the internal team and leadership about the geography and constituency that your hiring strategy will focus on.

In a place-based local employment strategy, your "place" may be as small as a few census tracts in a big city, or it may encompass most to all of a medium-sized or small city. Even if there are no

specific boundaries to your institution's economic footprint, starting from a clear definition of the place is key. Further, you will want to clarify whether there is a particular angle to diversity hiring that your institution should be addressing in this strategy: are you looking to improve racial minority representation, a gender imbalance, or is there a special focus on disabled citizens or veterans? Essentially, you are taking care to identify who the people are behind the strategies, plans, and data.

PUT THE DATA TO WORK

Hire Local strategy calls for tracking data from two angles: your institution's human capital data, and data about the applicant pool. Each of these aspects can be tracked whether your organizing goals are built around supporting diversity, place, or both.

ASSEMBLE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA ON EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

This perspective on the data can show where there are hiring and management practices going both right and wrong. Look at your institution's turnover data, and locate in which departments or functions the highest-turnover positions occur. Are there certain positions that turn over at a rate well above the institution's average? Looking at the termination details, and determining whether employees are leaving or are being fired, can help you develop a formal recruitment and training program that can effectively match local job seekers to more lasting employment in these positions.

It is additionally important to understand that for high-turnover positions where there is a higher voluntary than involuntary termination rate – in other words, employees are resigning rather than being fired - it could point to a problem with the practices of front-line managers. Here is where

you need to consider management training, which can happen simultaneously with a local employee recruitment and training program for best results. Failing to address pre-existing weaknesses in departmental management practices will mean that a high turnover rate will continue unabated, and will derail some of the successes of a local-hire strategy. A strong local recruitment project should improve employee retention, not leave high turnover patterns in place.

This, therefore, is an opportunity for collecting qualitative data about management practices and employee retention. Gather relevant managers in focus groups for a deep dive into the reasons for high turnover, including information that might not be revealed by the numbers. For example: are employees being fired because they have poor technical skills, or are they leaving the job because they lack the conflict-management skills that the workplace calls for? Note that when processing termination paperwork, it can be easier for managers to simply cite technical-skill deficiencies in departing workers when the deeper reasons for turnover are more strongly related to workplace culture. A focus group, perhaps facilitated with help from your community workforce access partner, can help uncover some of these dynamics.

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LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to looking at turnover data, gather information on job postings to identify positions that are being posted most frequently. These can flag areas of work or divisions that are growing quickly at your organization and which therefore represent opportunities for locally-focused and employer-customized recruitment, training, and placement programs. It is helpful to collaborate with colleagues in the institution who would have the best awareness of job openings being posted, and how frequently. Staying connected to decision makers leading divisions that do a lot of hiring will help you become aware of these opportunities.

In our training programs we take advantage of federal and state program funding available through our city's workforce-access agency. This funding provides us with six months of wage reimbursement for recruits in a customized training program, and the salary savings we experience can help us sell the program to colleagues.

ANALYZE THE WORKFORCE DATA WITH THESE QUESTIONS

What are the jobs in the institution that local residents are applying for, and what are these applicants qualified for?

This is information you can use to create a locally-focused recruitment strategy and training pipeline that better prepares local job seekers for success in the positions they are interested in.

What are the jobs that get very few applicants, and remain unfilled?

This is information you can use to design a training program to recruit and prepare local residents for these jobs, therefore opening new doors to employment while creating a benefit for a department that may be struggling to fill positions.

What are the weaknesses in the region's credentialing programs?

Additionally, for positions in the institution that require a credential or professional certificate, look at the local schools offering this training, and look for gaps between the training they provide and what the region's entry-level jobs require. For example, the medical assistant jobs with the major hospitals and medical systems in our region require applicants to arrive with a year of experience, while the for-profit schools doing medical assistant training only provide 12 weeks of externship experience. This is a substantial gap that gets in the way of employment for graduates of these programs. As we learned that there were many un- and under-employed medical assistant certificate holders in our geography, we were able to design a training and placement program with bridging that experience gap in mind.

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MANAGER TRAINING

PAIRING A MANAGER TRAINING PROGRAM WITH A COHORT-BASED LOCAL HIRE PROGRAM WILL GENERATE STRONGER RESULTS. CONSIDER SESSIONS THAT OFFER PRACTICAL TRAINING IN THESE AREAS:

- HOW TO GIVE EFFECTIVE AND CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK TO DIRECT REPORTS

- HOW TO COMMUNICATE TO WORKERS ABOUT WHAT THE WORKPLACE AND MANAGEMENT NEED

- CULTURAL COMPETENCE – MANAGING EFFECTIVELY ACROSS LINES OF CLASS, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

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HOW TO CREATE AN ON-THE-JOB COHORT-BASED LOCAL EMPLOYEE TRAINING PROGRAM

The results of your HR and workforce data collection and analysis can show you a path forward with a cohort-based local hire program that can match job seekers with job opportunities in departments and divisions that are experiencing high turnover or a growing number of new positions.

Cohort based training – walking a group of recruits through on-the-job training together – has two important features. The cohort framework offers a network of support and accountability among trainee peers that has been shown to support success in job placements. Cohort training is also substantially more cost effective than carrying out numerous unconnected training processes for individuals. These two benefits together make this approach to training local recruits a strong feature of a local-hire strategy.

MEET WITH THE LEADERSHIP IN HIGH-TURNOVER DEPARTMENTS AND DIVISIONS TO TALK THROUGH THE POSSIBILITIES OF LINKING THEM WITH A TRAINING PROGRAM

The selling points here include the salary savings that can be achieved by plugging into federal workforce dollars, in addition to being able to place well prepared new hires into these departments.

GET COMMITMENTS TO HIRE

A coordinated training program must have guaranteed job placements available to trainees who complete all phases of the program. A training program that is built on only vague possibilities of a participant being hired is a poor advertisement for your institution's commitment to local employment.

EQUIP YOUR TRAINEES WITH THE SKILLS THAT PARTICIPATING DEPARTMENTS AND DIVISIONS NEED

Matching your training content to the skills that hiring divisions are looking for makes your trainees a competitive choice. For example, if there is any proprietary software used in a high-turnover position, build time for learning that system into a customized training program. Make use of any institutional facilities like experiential learning labs to incorporate hands-on technical skills boot camps and assessments. In our medical assistant cohort training, our assistants arrive at their job placements ready to do blood draws and already comfortable with the proprietary patient records software, which is a substantial advantage for the hiring departments.

BUILD GRADUALLY TOWARDS FULL TRAINEE INTEGRATION IN THE WORKPLACE

It is helpful to have a phased on-the-job training schedule in which trainees initially split their time between the job site and a training classroom. This allows for a gradual transition that gives trainees the opportunity to reflect on their workplace experiences with their peers and trainers, and to make real-time course corrections in learning objectives based on their early performance. In our structure, trainees go from three to four to five days a week working at the job site over the course of six months, as they take on increasing responsibilities and knowledge.

USE TRAINING PROGRAM MILESTONES FOR INCREMENTAL TRAINEE WAGE INCREASES

In a paid on-the-job training program, the initial training wage can be lower than the eventual starting wage when successful trainees are hired into permanent positions. This is an incentive and reward for those who progress through the program.

PREPARE DEPARTMENT MANAGERS TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Other division employees may have questions about new hires who appear to spend so much time out of the job site. Transparency with all employees will create a better and more welcoming work environment for trainees, and spending time helping managers address these questions helps foster supportive work environments.

CONSIDER BUILDING A PEER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Peer mentorship links new trainees with high performing employees who are at their same job level at the job site. This creates additional support for trainees while at the same time acting as a professional development opportunity for the high performers.

CREATE A TRAINEE EVALUATION SYSTEM

A cohort training program is not over once the trainees have fully transitioned into their permanent placements. Work with your institution's HR department and participating hiring divisions to track how the trainees are performing in their jobs; this both provides supporting data about the longer-term effectiveness of the program, and it enables you to offer support to trainees in real time.

DEVELOP AN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Many institutions considering the design of an engaged-anchor strategy are located near communities where many residents have low educational attainment levels as well as limited access to computers and opportunities for digital skills development. At the same time, however, most higher-ed institutions require at least a high school diploma for most if not all of their positions. How can you reconcile these factors? Establish a program that helps adults gain digital access and literacy skills, and provides an opportunity for high school diploma or GED completion. It will increase the number of residents who can be eligible for jobs in the institution and with its major service vendors.

These are some general guidelines for designing a successful adult education and digital literacy program:

ESTABLISH A TRAINING LOCATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Residents may feel they are unwelcome on campus, or may be unsure of how to navigate campus space. Locating an adult education program in the community your institution wishes to partner with could be a useful bridge-building effort.

DON'T REINVENT ANY SERVICE WHEELS

Most universities do not have existing adult literacy programming, so connect with a well regarded regional literacy program to see if they are willing to bring their programming to your site. Many service nonprofits have performance metrics they must meet under their own funding agreements, as well as specific outreach goals that can align with your institution's strategy, and an invitation to expand their programming to a new location may be a benefit for them as well.

WORK TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Low-income neighborhoods tend to have low rates of home-based internet access. Your outreach site can join the local library in offering a place for adults to get online, access email, work on job applications, and improve their digital literacy. An open computer lab also provides opportunities for social connections in communities where poverty reinforces isolation.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS IN A HIRE LOCAL STRATEGY

- COMMIT AS AN INSTITUTION TO PAY THE LOCAL LIVING WAGE, AND ASK ALL OF YOUR VENDORS AND CONTRACTORS TO DO THE SAME.

- PARTICIPATE IN THE REGIONAL YOUTH WORKFORCE ACCESS PROGRAM, GETTING COMMITMENTS FROM DEPARTMENTS AND DIVISIONS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION TO HIRE AND MENTOR LOCAL YOUTH.

- ADD LOCAL-HIRE EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS INTO CONTRACTS WITH MAJOR SERVICE SUPPLIERS. THIS CAN BE AN ADDITIONAL VENUE FOR CUSTOMIZED JOB TRAINING.

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In our computer lab, job seekers come for help getting their resumes and cover letters in shape, including transitioning paper documents to electronic ones and getting help making those documents the best they can be. In a job marketplace where almost 100% of job postings are online, digital skills are survival skills, and so having a lab with staff who can teach job search skills and offer support with filling out online applications is a crucial part of the programming. This resource helps participants build the social capital they need to connect with jobs with our institution as well as around the city generally.

STAFF YOUR COMPUTER LAB WITH A TRAINER FROM THE COMMUNITY

This is another important bridge-builder. When residents can learn from somebody from their neighborhood, who they feel looks like them and who understands their experience, they are more likely to keep coming back to take advantage of support programming.

GIVE ADULT LEARNERS AND JOB SEEKERS IN YOUR PROGRAMS ACCESS TO YOUR INSTITUTION'S HR PERSONNEL

We have a weekly open session for one-on-one appointments in which participants can get help from our own HR staff with searching for job opportunities, filling out applications, writing resumes and cover letters, and getting practice with interview skills.

SOURCE TEMP EMPLOYEES LOCALLY

CONSIDER A PLACE-BASED SOLUTION TO TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE SOURCING. CONTRACTING WITH AN AGENCY TO FILL TEMPORARY POSITIONS MEANS PAYING A MARKUP ON WAGES AND SALARIES TO THE AGENCY.

AT DREXEL WE ASKED HR TO GIVE US ADVANCE OPPORTUNITIES TO RECRUIT TEMPORARY-POSITION APPLICANTS FROM OUR LOCAL JOB SEEKER POOL, DRAWN FROM PARTICIPANTS IN OUR COMMUNITY-BASED OPEN LAB AND ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

WHEN WE CAN USE OUR COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS TO PLACE A LOCAL RESIDENT INTO A TEMP POSITION, IT SAVES THE INSTITUTION 25% ON SALARY THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN PAID TO AN AGENCY, AND THERE ARE FURTHER SAVINGS WHEN THERE IS A GOOD FIT AND A DEPARTMENT IS ABLE TO TRANSITION A TEMPORARY EMPLOYEE INTO A PERMANENT POSITION.

PARTNERING WITH
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPLIERS FOR LOCAL HIRES

Not all the jobs on a university campus are sponsored directly by the institution. Many large anchor institutions establish contracts with major suppliers for functions like food, custodial, and security services, and this may represent a large swath of jobs that are inaccessible to local residents unless you have an agreement with the suppliers for local hiring.

SEEK OUT LIKE-MINDED SUPPLIERS

It can be an uphill battle to persuade a supplier to care about local investment if that is not already part of their established corporate values. Contracting with suppliers who identify local investment as part of their corporate mission makes the path to success significantly less complicated.

WRITE COMMITMENTS FOR LOCAL HIRING INTO RFP'S AND SUPPLIER CONTRACTS

Getting commitments down on paper is one of the most reliable ways to make progress in a local employment strategy, and it makes your institutional goals clear and unmistakable to suppliers.

For institutions that are not in a position to impose local hiring requirements on a supplier, you can opt to increase awareness and accountability by writing into contracts a schedule for simply reporting on any local hiring activity. We have found that quarterly reporting is manageable for our supplier partners. This is a way of showing the supplier that you care about this issue, and it can come into play as a factor in future contract renewals.
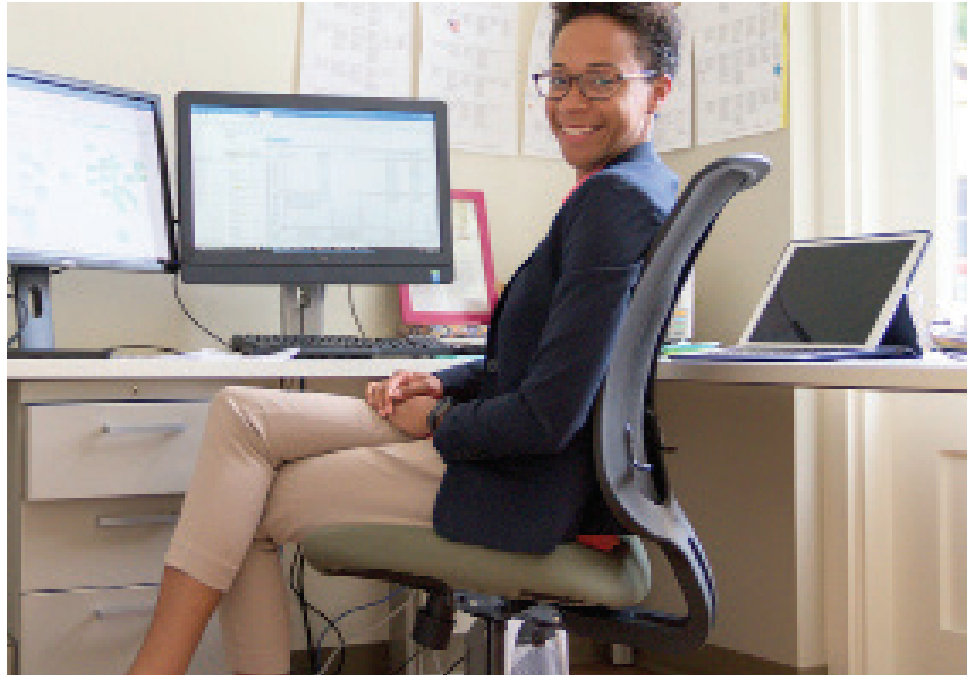
A POTENTIAL FOR LOW OVERHEAD WITH MEASURABLE BENEFITS

A relationship around local hires with suppliers can be as much or as little overhead as you are able to take on – our strategy is to connect major suppliers with our local workforce capacity building and access partner. We are not taking on the training ourselves as an institution but rather introducing business partners to the local agency with whom they can contract for customized recruitment and training to create a mutual win.

DON'T FORGET SMALLER SCALE SUPPLIERS

When considering smaller on-campus businesses – these are mostly food and retail - we survey them periodically about local hiring, and we make sure they are aware of opportunities to connect with local job seekers. Although these suppliers are often eager to partner with us on employment practices, follow-through can be a challenge.