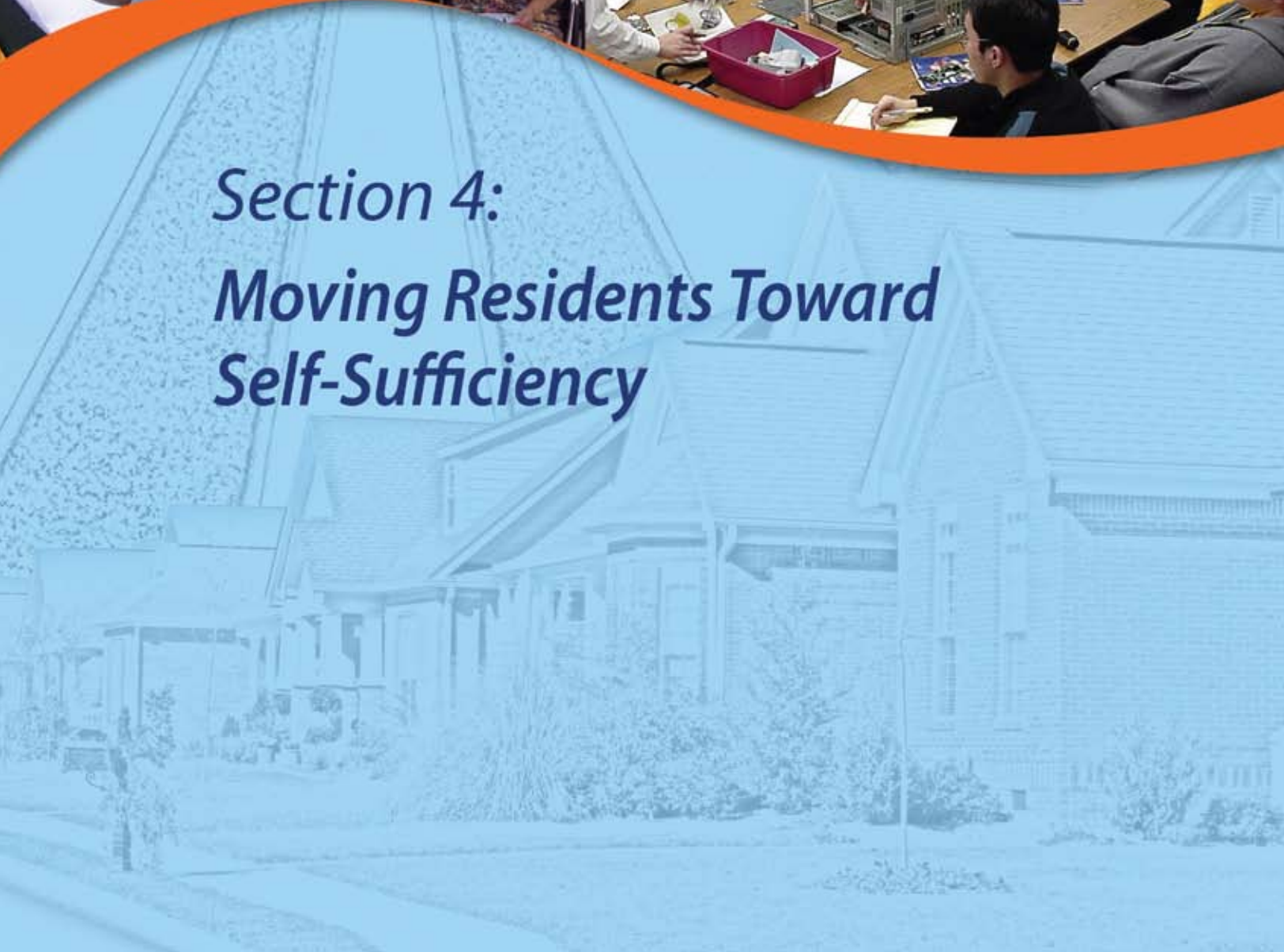




*Section 4:
Moving Residents Toward
Self-Sufficiency*



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Moving Residents Toward Self-Sufficiency

When Neighborhood Networks was established in 1995, it was one of the first federal initiatives to promote self-sufficiency among residents of Multifamily HUD FHA-insured and -assisted housing. While the mission of Neighborhood Networks is an ambitious one, it is achievable through the use of effective workforce development programs and services, such as child-care and transportation assistance, that help residents overcome the obstacles that lay in the path to self-sufficiency.

Workforce Development: The Foundation of Self-Sufficiency

Workforce development is a process through which people identify their vocational skills, interests, and aptitudes; seek to understand and respond to changes in the world of work; set personal goals for achievement and progress; make decisions that allow them to pursue these goals; and take part in opportunities for professional growth and advancement. In addition, workforce development programs provide residents with the skills they need to prepare for and conduct a job search, market themselves to potential employers, and maintain employment once they have been hired.

The Role of Centers

When it comes to providing workforce development programs, Neighborhood Networks centers play multiple roles. Centers may serve as an intermediary between center users and workforce development service providers that offer information, referral, and follow-along programs. (Follow-along programs ensure that individuals have been successful in locating employment programs and services within their community.)

A Neighborhood Networks center may also be a direct service provider of occupational skills training and placement services. Because of the significant costs associated with becoming a direct service provider, a center should first determine the scope and extent of the need for center-sponsored and -supported employment services. Other considerations in planning to become a direct service provider of occupational skills training and placement should include:

- Fund development, tax status, fiduciary responsibility, governance, and insurance liability.
- Participant entrance and exit criteria.
- Staffing and staff competencies, licensure, and accreditation requirements.
- Development of specific occupational skills training curriculum standards.
- Program evaluation and outcomes measurement.
- Physical facilities, materials, and supplies.
- Hours of operation.
- Other overhead costs associated with provider status.

Types of Workforce Development Programs

Whether a Neighborhood Networks center opts to serve as an intermediary between residents and workforce development program providers, or to be a direct service provider, centers may wish to consider focusing their efforts on four basic areas of programming:

- **Basic skills programs** designed to increase residents' job-applicable knowledge and skills. These include General Educational Development (GED)

preparation, basic reading, writing, math, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

- **Job-readiness and retention programs** designed to provide residents with skills that will prepare them for job interviews and professional settings. These include time management, conflict resolution, problem solving, professional dress and demeanor, and communication skills classes. These programs also address job retention by helping residents overcome barriers that prevent them from retaining employment. Included in job retention programs are one-on-one counseling, support groups, childcare services, transportation assistance, and career planning.
- **Job development and placement programs** designed to help residents through employment recruitment. With these programs, center staff members refer job-seeking residents to sources of employment information and/or job opportunities.
- **Career growth and advancement programs** designed to provide guidance in career advancement.

Basic Skills Programs

Today's workforce is rapidly changing and so are the skills that employees need to change with or join the workforce. However, many potential employees lack the essential basic skills to keep pace with these changes or enter into even the lowest levels of employment.

The ever-evolving workplace demands a new kind of worker with a broad set of skills. In addition to the traditional basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic—skills such as problem solving, listening, negotiating, and knowing how to learn have also become essential. Deficiencies in many of these basic skills are barriers to entry-level employees, as well as experienced employees and dislocated workers attempting to adapt to economic and technological change.

Those Most in Need of Basic Skills

As workplace skill requirements change, the number of unemployed and underemployed adults who lack the literacy, arithmetic, English language, or other essential skills to succeed on the job increases. This diverse range of jobseekers includes:

- **Immigrants.** Immigrants and refugees account for a large and expanding portion of the American workforce. Many newcomers lack English language skills and may have had limited education in their home nations. In some cases, immigrants and refugees speak and understand English but have a heavy accent or use a nonstandard American-English dialect that makes communication difficult. Cultural differences can also present barriers to communication with employers.
- **Out-of-school youth and adults who never earned a high school diploma or equivalent.** Many employers now require job candidates to have a high school diploma or equivalent. Even if a person has strong basic skills, the lack of a secondary school credential can still be a barrier. Additionally, lack of this type of credential is often associated with real deficits in basic skills, which can also prevent workers from getting and keeping good jobs.
- **High school graduates.** Some high school graduates may have been out of school and/or the labor market for many years. As a result, they may lack key basic skills important in the current workplace.
- **People with learning disabilities.** Learning disabilities can present serious barriers to employment and other aspects of life for adults. There are several types of learning disabilities. Adults who lack basic skills may have some form of diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disability. People with learning disabilities may also face other challenges, such as the lack of a secondary school credential.
- **Prisoners or ex-offenders.** Individuals who have been incarcerated are disproportionately more

description are cooking, housekeeping, and manufacturing. To improve their circumstances and avoid dependency, they will need to have ESL training and any other services delivered at times that do not interfere with their motivation and work ethic. Neighborhood Networks centers offering ESL training must provide flexible scheduling, such as evening and weekend access, for participants.

To deliver ESL services as a component of basic skills, Neighborhood Networks centers must have available staff members in an instructor/facilitator role. The staff member should be skilled in ESL instruction, which does not require the ability to speak a foreign language because instructors speak only in English to their learners, reinforcing the use of English as the sole acceptable means of expression when in an ESL learning mode. Because of this, an instructor/facilitator can work with a variety of ESL students who come from differing language backgrounds, making it a cost-effective method of delivering the service.

Adult Basic Education

Adult basic education in its broadest definition encompasses the minimum skills necessary to achieve individual employment, leisure, and vocational goals. These skills, although individualized and affected by the labor market and community opportunities, most commonly include reading, writing, mathematics, communication (oral and written), analysis, problem solving, technology, and lifelong learning. The primary objective of adult education is the provision of services that enhance these basic skills to the level needed to achieve fuller participation in the community and to meet personal goals.

Adult basic education is closely tied with the basic skills component of workforce development services. Adult basic education will often be a stepping-stone from services such as literacy, numeracy, and ESL to GED preparation or test taking. Adult basic education is also directly related to employment skills because entry-level jobs increasingly require employees to have more academic skills. It is often appropriate to increase basic education skills either before entry

into occupational skills training or concurrently with that training.

Adult Basic Education Training Delivery Methods

Adult basic education training needs can be assessed through a vocational evaluation process. For Neighborhood Networks centers that do not offer formal evaluation services, needs can be identified through self-reports and/or thorough assessments conducted during intake prior to the center's regular program offerings. The Web site for the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) offers guidance on vocational assessments. Visit www.acteonline.org for more detailed information.

To meet the needs identified through evaluation or assessment, Neighborhood Networks centers may opt to incorporate a basic academic skills component into existing programs of job readiness and specific occupational skills training. For occupation-specific training programs, the academic component should be specific to the occupation for which the individual is being trained.

In other cases, where the basic academic skills component is not an integral part of the job training curriculum, adult basic education skills can be offered as an option in addition to other services. This approach addresses basic academics independently from vocational training and goals.

Service options for adult basic education are many and include:

- Direct provision of remedial education by the Neighborhood Networks center using a variety of commercial or locally developed educational materials. This service can stand alone or be directly incorporated into an existing service. For example, an individual in a computer skills training program may meet with an instructor on a regular basis to address skills consistent with those needed for successful training and employment in a chosen field. Adult basic education for computer operators may then be incorporated into the computer skills curriculum.

- Refer individuals with adult basic education deficiencies to another service provider to receive services that complement those the center provides. Although this is a viable and frequently used method, some level of control over the instruction will be lost. When referring an individual to an outside organization, it is always good practice to maintain contact with the external provider to ensure consistency in instruction and relevance of lessons.
- Use professional staff or volunteers from another program or organization. This can be accomplished through a partnership agreement between the center and a local educational entity to provide adult basic education training to center clientele. The actual training may take place at the center or at a mutually agreed-on site.

How a center goes about providing adult basic education services should depend on the center's resources, the needs of those being served, and the current level of service provision in the general community. Although a Neighborhood Networks center may have the resources to provide adult basic education training, it may be duplicating existing services that are already sufficient to meet community needs.

Careful consideration should also be given to the learning needs and styles of the people to be served. Although many adult basic education programs have pre-established curricula, they may not be appropriate for specific learning styles. Materials and service delivery must be flexible to support distinctive styles and needs. Some individuals excel through individual, self-paced instruction and learning, whereas others benefit from a group-based learning environment. Many commercially developed adult basic education instructional programs take these differences into account and can be modified for use individually or through instructor-led group learning. There are several online tests that evaluate an individual's learning style. A search on the Internet using the words "learning style evaluation" will reveal those sites that can be assessed for appropriateness and relevancy.

General Educational Development (GED)

The GED examination is taken to achieve the equivalent of a high school diploma. GED preparation refers to the aspects involved with preparing for the GED examination. In addition to providing instruction in specific examination subject areas, GED preparation also addresses test-taking anxieties, preconceptions of examinations, and low self-esteem.

For individuals with low basic academic skills or those who experience significant difficulty with reading and mathematics, GED preparation is a hierarchical stage in the learning and achieving process. For some people, GED preparation may be the only academic assistance they need. For others, however, it may not be needed until after receiving remedial academic assistance to improve other basic skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and/or ESL.

GED preparation can also be offered as a service to enhance a person's skills and increase potential for success in an employment-related training program or to provide the credentials to gain access to higher level programs or employment. In fact, GED skills and test taking are often directly related to employment skills training, because a high school diploma or equivalent is usually required or preferred for many employment situations. GED preparation and test completion may even be a prerequisite for specific occupational skills training.

GED Training Delivery Methods

The need for GED preparation courses or access to the test is often assessed through a vocational evaluation. However, the typical center may not offer vocational evaluation. Those centers that do not offer vocational education may wish to incorporate an assessment method that determines the need and/or desire for GED services.

GED preparation is very specific and exact because it is a process of teaching for a specific test. As a result, GED preparation cannot effectively be incorporated into most existing programs. However, if an individual identifies lack of high school credentials

as a barrier to achieving vocational goals, centers have several options from which to choose. GED preparation and test-taking opportunities can be provided by the Neighborhood Networks center, or the center may facilitate access to outside providers offering GED courses. Neighborhood Networks centers that do not provide GED preparation courses can refer individuals to community programs that are known as GED providers. Some centers may have a GED preparation program available in-house either through contractual, volunteer, or partnership agreements with other agencies. Some centers may receive grant funds to support a full program staffed by center employees. Any of these options is appropriate, and the one selected should be based on center resources, individual choice, and opportunities within the community.

The approach to services will also vary based on individual learning styles and needs. Some individuals may learn best through self-paced programs and individual learning. Others may prefer instructor-led training and/or group processes. Assessment of each participant's current knowledge base and learning style can be incorporated into the services offered to ensure that these services meet and address each participant's specific needs.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is intricately woven into the fabric of workforce development. The identification of a need for lifelong learning will likely emerge during the career development process. However, it is not limited to vocational training and the pursuit of employment, although a strong relationship exists with the vocational context. Lifelong learning also assists participants in finding greater pleasure in life through the pursuit of knowledge. In this way, it incorporates the ability to use community resources and to develop wholesome leisure skills. Because it is associated with both work and play, lifelong learning can provide a context for both occupational information and non-vocational pursuits.

The recognition of lifelong learning as a service delivery element lends credence to statements about

the changing nature of the world of work. The occupational demands of modern life require continuing education on a variety of levels. Within the scope of a Neighborhood Networks center's workforce development efforts, the decision to acquire any of the elements associated with employment skills is the recognition that skills learned today will need to be upgraded and refined as jobs change.

Lifelong Learning Training Delivery Methods

Neighborhood Networks center users should feel empowered to determine whether they wish to upgrade and enhance their current labor market skills, learn new skills related to employment outcomes, and identify and pursue personal goals more closely associated with vocational pursuits. Decisions related to lifelong learning have a bearing on employment skills, as well as social and life skills.

There are many ways to include lifelong learning within a Neighborhood Networks center's programs. Lifelong learning can be discussed within the context of vocational evaluation and/or assessment. Through a discussion of attitudes, interests, and skills, a conversation regarding career versus personal-interest options can occur. The results of the evaluation or assessment should be presented to the individual with a facilitated approach to discerning possible options for employment and lifelong vocational pursuits.

During this evaluation and assessment, there should also be opportunities to discuss enhancing and refining occupational skills and/or repackaging current skills into more marketable assets. An example of this might be a person who was in the labor market more than 20 years ago. At that time, he/she was a legal secretary and typed 90 words per minute. Before reshaping the individual's keyboard skills and making him/her "marketable," it would be appropriate to raise the question of whether learning computer skills was an interest related to his/her current occupational choice.

Although workforce development is primarily concerned with employment, lifelong learning presents

a unique opportunity to provide a valuable set of resources to program participants. During evaluation and/or assessment, but before the development of an individual program plan, each person served should understand the labor market requirements of the specific occupations in which they have demonstrated an interest. If the participant understands that the desired career requires the acquisition of a significant body of knowledge and does not elect to pursue this career because of financial or time constraints, it would be appropriate to provide information and resources that would allow him/her to continue to enjoy aspects of that career on a non-vocational basis. For instance, the person who wishes to become a veterinarian but is unable to pursue the undergraduate and graduate training requirements of this career can be directed toward volunteer options of working with domestic animals in the community. This activity is not in lieu of a job, but as an adjunct to employment. A center can direct individuals to available lifelong resources to facilitate this pursuit. These resources may include, but are not limited to, community college catalogs, lists of clubs and organizations, instructional and study programs sponsored by local and state governments, and volunteer center lists.

Activities of Daily/Independent Living

The concept of independent living and daily living skills training is congruent with the concept of workforce development because it promotes full inclusion and participation within the community through skills attainment, information, and opportunity. Independent and daily living skills are, in many instances, directly related to workforce success. For a majority of the population, employment is very much a part of daily independent living, and without skills of daily living, employment is difficult to achieve. For example, a person with basic budgeting and money management skills has more opportunity for success in customer service occupations than a person who lacks these skills. Training in daily living skills and opportunities for independent living also greatly enhances the opportunities afforded people with disabilities, youth transitioning from foster care, and people with other special needs.

Activities of Daily Living/Independent Living Training Delivery Methods

Personal independence gained through daily/independent living skills directly impacts an individual's workplace development success. Assessment should accurately determine an individual's current skills levels and needs, and determine to what extent any deficiencies impact the individual's chances for getting and keeping a job. As with other basic skills, the information gathered and assessment data must be clearly stated and interpreted to the participant along with available service options. It is only through this sharing of information that an individual can determine his/her direction and goals.

The basic daily living skills that are needed for optimum success in existing Neighborhood Networks center programs should be emphasized. Remediation options should be identified and implemented as individuals demonstrate deficiencies in basic skills. Through participant assessment and information gathering, an individual's need for daily living skills and services to enhance independent living can be identified.

Meeting independent living and activities of daily living service needs does not require a full and separate program operated by a Neighborhood Networks center. These service needs can be met in many ways. The center may offer a series of daily living skills courses in which residents may choose to participate. An individual counseling approach may be more in line with center resources or with the needs of those served. Centers can also refer individuals to available community resources. At a minimum, a Neighborhood Networks center could maintain a library of resources and activities that teach and promote daily living skills. This library should, however, be supported by case management staff who can enhance the material for participants. A variety of commercially developed resources and materials can be used and adapted to meet the specific needs and goals of individuals served.

and residents to be trained. In addition, a provider offers a verifiable record of effectiveness and none of the risks a center would face starting its own program. Lastly, using job-readiness training providers that have established relationships with local employers will increase the likelihood of job placements for graduates.

Centers should verify the performance of job-readiness training vendors to assess the quality and content of the program. This should include a vendor-provided summary of completion rates, job placement, and retention outcomes of graduates. Other ways to evaluate the effectiveness of potential providers include checking with program graduates and local employers for references of the job-readiness training provider and having staff observe vendors conducting job-readiness training.

- **Establish a partnership with a local public-sector provider.** Use a public-sector provider if no other job-readiness training exists or if the center budget will not support other training. Open-entry, open-exit training rules permit these providers to offer more opportunities to jobseekers without skills or workplace experience. To evaluate the program, follow the same steps as above.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Job-Readiness Training Vendors and Programs

- Request a summary report that includes completion, job placement, and job-retention rates of graduates from the training vendor.
- Contact graduates and local employers and ask them to provide a reference for the training vendor.
- Observe vendor during the training session.

Communicating the Importance of Job-Readiness Training

Employers agree about one common factor in successful recruitment: people interviewing for entry-level jobs must have sufficient soft skills—such as a strong work ethic, reliability, punctuality, and good communication skills—to be hired and remain employed. Whether you provide the job-readiness training directly or work with external organizations, communicating this employer standard and expectation to center staff and the resident population will offer the following benefits:

- **Emphasize the employment focus of the training.** This begins the process of moving participants into an active job-readiness training mode.
- **Obtain buy-in of the training from residents.** Gaining acceptance of this employer requirement from residents will motivate them to take the training seriously.
- **Make training participants more employer-focused.** As jobseekers become more sensitive to employer requirements, they focus more on achieving employment and self-sufficiency goals. This also ensures higher training success.
- **Ensure a more productive recruitment effort for the training.** A sound understanding and acceptance of the value of job-readiness training by staff will help them to communicate more effectively with residents as they begin the recruitment process.

The following strategies are especially important for centers that decide to become a direct job-readiness training program provider. However, they will also be useful for centers that engage in partnerships or contractual relationships with outside providers, as they will represent key aspects of the program that should be monitored throughout the partnership or contract to ensure successful outcomes.

Involving Employers in Training

Local employers will benefit greatly from involvement in a Neighborhood Networks center's job-readiness training. Their input can help create a customized workforce of future employees for their company. Additionally, their involvement will:

- **Send a message of hope to participants in the training.** Employer involvement shows participants that there are real job opportunities available after the training and that there are employers interested in helping them succeed.
- **Expose participants to workplace culture.** Participants begin to understand what it takes to get hired and promoted within a specific company.
- **Provide participants with the opportunity to speak with employers.** Participants receive the opportunity to ask questions about the company's policies and procedures. The interaction also builds self-esteem and confidence.

Neighborhood Networks center staff members should conduct employer outreach and handle the scheduling of visits to the training site by employer staff such as line supervisors and human resources personnel for question-and-answer sessions with residents. Staff members should encourage visiting employers or human resources officers to bring job applications and conduct onsite interviews of participants who are job-ready. Centers should set aside a private room for interviews.

Establishing Relationships with Local Job-Placement Providers

Encourage service providers who facilitate job placement to participate in the training and to meet with prospective jobseekers. The participation of job-placement specialists adds credibility to the training and sends a message to students that there are ample opportunities for employment if they complete the training.

Centers should incorporate site visits by job-placement specialists into their training curricula.

The visits will provide an opportunity for the job-placement specialist to meet each program participant individually. A center should obtain an agreement from the placement provider that it will furnish post-training employment outcome data on all of the center's referrals.

Identifying and Evaluating Employment Strengths and Barriers

To design an effective job-readiness training program, center staff members must first identify the barriers to employment for each training participant, such as transportation, child or elder care, or substance abuse. They should then focus on academic testing of reading, writing, and math skills, as well as English proficiency and aptitude. A jobseeker's employment preferences must be identified, because an individual's desire to work in a specific field or occupation affects job retention.

This information becomes especially important as the target population moves into the job-placement phase. The information should be organized in a database that can be used by case managers as they provide support and assistance to individuals through the job-readiness training and placement process that follows. There are commercially available database programs specifically designed for client service, tracking, and reporting.

Creating a Mission Statement and Training Goals

Both staff and students need an effective mission statement for the job-readiness training to help them establish and achieve goals. The participants should commit to improving their attitudes, career paths, and lifestyles.

Training goals are often specific targets tailored to individual participants. Trainers can encourage participants to create their own goals for the training and strategies to achieve them. Goals may include the resolution of barriers or a change in specific

behaviors. For example, a participant who is chronically late for appointments can set punctuality as a goal. Specific goals also help individuals assume responsibility and take ownership of their futures.

Establishing Individual Participation Rules

Individual participation rules help participants modify negative behaviors. Basic rules should include:

- Prohibition of alcohol or drug use.
- Punctuality—showing up on time.
- Consistent attendance.
- Positive attitude.

Participants must understand that the rules for the training are the same as those in the workplace. Those who are chronically late or absent from work will be fired, without exception. At the outset, inform participants that if they violate any of the rules, they will be expelled from the training cycle.

Establish a fixed number of permissible absences and late arrivals. Expel participants who go beyond the minimum number and allow them to start again in a new training cycle. Generally, two unexcused absences or three late arrivals to class provide sufficient grounds for removal. Center staff should also decide

Form a Job Club

An effective way to support the workforce needs of residents is through peer-driven job clubs. Job clubs are structured, group job searches. The original job club model has been internally replicated and adapted for various populations. Success stems from the concept that peer support energizes jobseekers as they search for work. For more information on job clubs, visit www.quintcareers.com/job_club.html.

what constitutes a permissible excuse and communicate attendance rules orally and in writing to all participants.

Assessing the Job-Readiness Levels

Categorize the target population into levels of job readiness. The levels should vary by the participants' strengths, weaknesses, and issues that pose barriers to employment:

- **Level I:** Individuals with a recent work history, no health problems or obvious employment barriers, and the motivation to find a job.
- **Level II:** Individuals with no employment history who are physically and mentally able to work, but have various employment barriers, such as childcare, transportation, domestic abuse, or low self-esteem.

Depending on available staff resources, it may be more effective to develop two different training models based on the job readiness of participants.

Designing the Job-Readiness Training

The job-readiness training curriculum, format, and length must be designed with participants' job-readiness levels in mind. Following are examples of training modules for Level I and Level II participants (Exhibits 1 and 2).

Building Staff Capacity in Training

One of the essential aspects of a successful soft skills training course is the ability of the trainer to deliver the curriculum in a credible and inspirational manner. Trainers of the most successful job-readiness training models play different roles simultaneously. These roles include teacher, authority figure, disciplinarian, role model, parent, friend, and potential employer. Trainers must have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, be sensitive, and have motivational training skills. They must also understand and be able to communicate employers' perceptions and points of view about hiring.

Exhibit 1. Job Readiness Level I

Length of training: 7 to 10 days.

Format: In-class instruction and outside job interviews.

Orientation: Schedule an orientation day before the first day of training to explain the goals, objectives, curriculum, and rules that participants must follow to graduate from the training. Participants will then have time to decide whether they are ready to take the training. The orientation will help screen out those who are ambivalent about the program or lack the necessary motivation to complete it. Training should begin promptly at the scheduled time.

Curriculum: Focus on the following subject areas:

- **Goals.** Participants should have personal goals and objectives, including the type of job they want. Goal setting provides participants with choices about their lives and encourages them to take responsibility.
- **Communication skills.** Every entry-level jobseeker needs this essential soft skill to get hired and keep a job. Most employers and human resource officers acknowledge that this is often the most important quality on which hiring decisions are made. Encourage participants to present their goals to the class. This exercise improves communication skills and boosts confidence.
- **Interview techniques.** As part of the communication skills segment, participants should work on eye contact, posture, body language, a firm handshake, and interview skills. The most effective job-readiness training courses use video cameras to record participants in mock interviews. This is an important learning device and should be included, if the budget permits.
- **Effective résumé.** Regardless of the lack of prior work experience, a jobseeker should understand the importance of a properly prepared résumé and how to produce one. Even a résumé that lists basic biographical data sends a positive message to the interviewer that the applicant is highly motivated to obtain a job and understands how the process works.
- **Dress for success.** Professional dress can mean the difference between getting a job and not. Appropriate attire for a job interview is often different than daily business attire in the workplace. Many programs provide proper interview attire for low-income jobseekers.
- **Employment application forms.** Participants should have the opportunity to review many different job application forms, including those of the employers with whom they will be interviewing. This will help to improve confidence levels as they prepare for interviews.
- **Job search and career options.** The knowledge of how to find a job, how to network, and how to arrange an interview is essential for those with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency. Most likely, the first job they get after training will not be their last. Participants should be prepared and encouraged to continue seeking jobs with better compensation and career potential.

Exhibit 2. Job Readiness Level II

Length of training: Three to four weeks (35 to 40 hours per week).

Format: In-class instruction and outside job interviews.

Orientation: Schedule an orientation day before the first day of training to explain the goals, objectives, curriculum, and rules of participation.

Curriculum: Focus on the subject areas outlined in Job Readiness Level I, as well as:

- **Employment barrier resolution.** As part of the curriculum, participants should work on resolving barriers to employment. Trainers should discuss these issues with each participant throughout the course.
- **Self-esteem and confidence building.** This is an essential area of improvement for those participants without workplace experience or job skills.
- **Time and stress management.** Help participants improve chronic punctuality problems and suggest strategies for dealing with the resulting stress caused by poor time management.
- **Money management and budgeting.** This is a critical skill for participants who want to reorganize their lives and prepare for the eventual challenges of living without the aid of public assistance. This segment of the training typically includes how to open a checking or savings account, tips for balancing a checkbook, and how to prepare a budget.
- **Employer interviews.** Participants in the longer pre-employment training cycle should be prepared and required to take a minimum of two to three actual job interviews to give them experience and post-interview assessment.

Centers that use in-house staff members as trainers should explore train-the-trainer courses offered by many job-readiness training vendors. Funding for this specific type of activity does not exist. If the training entity also provides job placement, the center could try to negotiate an agreement to refer its job-ready graduates for job placement in exchange for a lower fee to train its trainers. Service providers are likely to agree to this because they are often looking for a reliable source of job-ready candidates.

Evaluating Trainers

Reviewing and assessing trainers ensures the continued improvement and quality management of the training. An evaluation form should be prepared and completed by every participant on the final day of

training. Request that the training vendor distribute evaluation forms to participants to be completed prior to leaving the class. Ask that the training vendor compile a summary of the evaluation forms, as well as the original forms. If the training vendor is not willing to do this, request that the forms be provided for your own evaluation. Review the evaluation form prior to its distribution to participants to ensure it captures the information you would like. If the training vendor does not provide an evaluation summary, create one that determines whether students' expectations were met, the strengths and weaknesses of the class, the level of usefulness and applicability of the class, what additional information should be included, what information can be eliminated from the class, and whether they would recommend this class to others. The center should assign

other staff to periodically monitor the training and submit and review independent evaluations of staff trainers. Following the reviews, center management staff should meet with the trainers to discuss findings and suggestions for improvement.

Measuring Outcomes

Measuring outcomes is an essential requirement for any type of stand-alone training. Job-readiness training is no exception. Centers should assign a staff person to monitor the progress of program graduates. Measurement should focus on job placement (or failure to obtain employment) for each participant and on the percentage of program graduates still employed at 3-, 6-, and 9-month intervals following initial placement.

Compiling accurate performance measurement data is valuable in several ways:

- It provides guidance on how to improve the training product.
- It provides a critical tool for raising funds from both the government and private foundations.
- It can be used to market the program to potential employer partners and participants.

Providing Case Management Support

Case management support for newly hired program graduates has a significant impact on job retention success. Case management must also be available before the training, however, to help individuals develop the confidence they need to make the transition from assistance to self-sufficiency.

One-on-one support is important to the client, but weekly support groups for those making the transition into employment or searching for work is a proven best practice in case management. These support groups offer participants the opportunity to share achievements, frustrations, and problems encountered in their new jobs with fellow pre-employment training graduates. These support groups often provide new approaches and strategies for overcoming barriers to job success.

Job Retention: Teaching Residents the Recipe for Employment Success

Research indicates that nearly 22 percent of families leaving welfare return within 2 years. It is clear that simply helping residents find employment is not enough.

Effective retention support for these individuals often means the difference between success and failure. This means providing newly hired workers with the emotional and non-job-related service support needed to make successful transitions into their jobs and then to retain employment. Follow-up retention services, such as helping new employees with childcare or transportation or mediating domestic disputes and/or worksite conflicts with supervisors, provide residents with the tools they need to help retain their first or second jobs and to start building strong employment histories. This is critical to obtain better jobs and achieve the ultimate objective of self-sufficiency. Other retention services can include helping participants adapt to the new demands of a business environment, including understanding the importance of punctuality, dress, and professional behavior.

Many of the issues such as childcare and transportation that are addressed through retention services should be discussed as soon as the resident begins job-readiness training in preparation for a job search and placement. Once a resident begins employment, center staff or service provider case managers should maintain, at a minimum, weekly contact with residents to help them resolve unexpected issues that may lead to job loss. Close contact and support by case managers in the first few weeks of a new job provide many new workers with the confidence and emotional stability needed to be productive and successful.

Neighborhood Networks centers can identify, provide, and use local partners and center staff to deliver effective follow-up retention services to residents who

have recently made the transition from unemployment to employment. This is the most recommended course of action because of the labor-intensive requirements of an effective follow-up retention program. Neighborhood Networks centers may elect to use local nonprofit or for-profit service providers that offer follow-up retention support as part of their job placement initiative.

Centers should ensure that the service provider they choose schedules the same case manager to continue to work with the same resident throughout the process, starting with the job search. The case manager should provide moral and practical support and guidance to the resident through the first weeks and months of a new job. The best local information resource for identifying organizations that offer retention services is the local Private Industry Council (PIC) or Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Centers can check the Internet for their state's Department of Labor Web site and look up the number for the nearest WIB.

Centers that choose to provide job-retention services directly can utilize the following key elements of an effective retention effort and strategies for starting new or supplementing existing retention services. However, they will also be useful for centers that engage in partnerships or contractual relationships with outside providers, as they will represent key aspects of the program that should be monitored throughout the partnership or contract to ensure successful outcomes.

Addressing Difficult Issues

The critical period in the transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency is the initial weeks or months on the first job. To provide effective support, Neighborhood Networks staff must thoroughly understand the issues residents face in the workplace and how to help them get through this crucial period.

The major issues residents will encounter include:

- **Meeting the performance, cultural, and emotional demands of the workplace.** People who are new to the workforce are suddenly confronted with new questions and concerns about adapting to the workplace environment and balancing family and work demands. Neighborhood Networks centers can help residents understand the relationship between employer and employee and the importance of a professional demeanor. Issues surrounding childcare and workplace behavior may also emerge.
- **Handling the cost of going to work.** Financial management is one of the crucial needs of newly employed workers. Oftentimes, new workers have difficulties managing new and unexpected expenses, such as commuting costs, car repairs, after-hours childcare, and work clothes expenses. To afford these costs in addition to standard family expenses, new workers must learn how to create and manage a budget.
- **Balancing family and work demands.** Newly employed individuals who have been on welfare or unemployed for a long time may have low self-esteem and difficulty ignoring negative reactions from family or friends. These individuals may also feel guilty about leaving small children or infants with caregivers.

Developing Tactics for Helping Newly Employed Residents

An effective follow-up retention program should provide someone who can work closely with individuals at these primary points of intervention:

- **Initial entry into the self-sufficiency process.** A successful transition into the workplace begins on the first day of job-readiness preparation with the development of a positive attitude. Discussion should emphasize the importance of a strong work ethic, with particular emphasis on punctuality, responsibility, and a positive demeanor. During this pre-job-placement period, the case manager and jobseeker should immediately identify and

resolve all potential employment barriers, including childcare (availability, affordability, and backup plans), transportation, personal finance, and legal issues.

- **Point of hire.** This step in the process requires more than a brief telephone call to check up on the resident. Building trust between the case manager and the resident requires providing frequent contact and support, asking probing questions, and visiting the employment site when appropriate. This is a critical period in the transition to employment. To succeed, the newly hired person needs all the practical and moral support possible.
- **First 4 weeks on a new job.** There should be personal communication with the new worker, either by telephone or in person, at least once a week during the first month and once each month thereafter. The new worker should be encouraged to call his or her case manager any time a problem arises.
- **At the end of the first 6 months.** Research indicates that some new workers may quit their initial employment at this point. Reasons for leaving the job include stress in balancing workplace and family demands, concern about potential lack of wage increases or job promotion, or the perception of little career advancement potential at the company. To promote job retention and career advancement at this point, Neighborhood Networks staff members should review the new worker's progress, achievements, and transferable skills. If career growth does not seem promising with the current employer, staff should advise the worker about how to seek new employment at companies that offer sustainable career growth.
- **Intervention after job loss.** Residents' confidence and self-esteem can be shaken by job loss. Once they understand why they lost their jobs, Neighborhood Networks staff should encourage residents to move forward and immediately undertake new job searches by helping them to update their résumés, check local help wanted classified ads, and call to arrange interviews. This is a period that often requires one-on-one

counseling. Communication with residents during this period is essential to prevent them from dwelling on the job loss and losing the ambition to continue the job search effort.

Identifying and Developing an Effective Retention Program

Whether a Neighborhood Networks center contracts for retention services with a local service provider or develops its own program, several program components should be included for effectiveness:

- **Proactive and supportive staff members.** Staff members should establish trusting relationships with the residents and know their personal histories, potential employment barriers, strengths, and weaknesses.
- **Frequency and length of services support.** The most effective programs include weekly personal contact by case managers with both the residents and worksite supervisors (depending on workers' preferences) during their first month of employment. There should be a minimum of one personal communication per month with residents thereafter. Residents should be encouraged to contact case managers regarding problems at any time. Similarly, worksite supervisors should be encouraged to call case managers if potential problems arise.
- **Employer support for onsite mentoring and job coaching support for residents.** Some service providers with effective retention services also educate employers on the importance of establishing an employee assistance program (EAP). EAPs are company-operated programs that typically offer a telephone hotline that employees can call for information and referrals on a wide range of issues, including personal finance, substance abuse, childcare, legal, and work-related problems. EAPs also increasingly provide financial support or partial tuition reimbursement to employees who want to acquire further education related to specific job assignments. Service providers can also help establish such programs or make suggestions

for improving these programs to respond to issues of entry-level workers.

- **Neighborhood-based weekly peer support groups.** In support groups, residents can share successes, concerns, and common workplace issues with others who are employed.

To evaluate existing retention programs, ask the service provider for names of employers to call for their assessment of case management support of entry-level workers hired. Contact some clients and elicit their assessment of the retention support. Examine client retention percentages at the 6- and 12-month marks. For clients with few employment barriers, a 55 percent to 60 percent retention rate is realistic. Be suspicious of retention percentages exceeding 85 percent. These percentages are relative, based on the number of employment barriers faced by the population served.

Determining Scope of Retention Services that Residents Need

Because retention services are costly and labor intensive, Neighborhood Networks center staff members should develop strategies that target residents who are at greatest risk of failing in their first jobs. This requires centers to extensively screen individuals to identify those with the greatest barriers to sustained employment, then compile a database that is accessible to staff members and case managers. Potential barriers to employment include:

- Preschool-age children and potentially unstable childcare arrangements.
- Low level of basic skills and little work experience.
- Lack of high school diploma or GED and low math/reading literacy.
- Less than 20 years old.
- Absence of a supportive adult in household.
- Lack of a driver's license.
- Lack of transportation.

- An existing health problem.
- Minimum wage job without benefits.

A resident with three or more of these barriers may need extensive job-retention services to succeed.

To ensure broader coverage for residents, Neighborhood Networks staff should design a mixed strategy of retention support services. By separating residents into high-, medium-, and low-risk categories, centers can ensure that all residents receive some retention support, rather than concentrating all available resources on the high-risk group. Categories may be defined as:

- **High risk.** A resident faced with three or more barriers is at high risk. In-person weekly contact with the resident during the first month on the job and monthly contact for the next 6 months is essential. The resident should be involved in a neighborhood-based peer support group. The case manager should provide contact encouragement and one-on-one counseling with the resident as needed and be available by telephone or in person when a problem arises. The case manager should also be in contact with the worker's supervisor to identify early warnings of potential problems.
- **Medium risk.** A resident with two or more barriers is considered at medium risk. Weekly telephone contact with the resident during the first month on the job and monthly contact for the first 6 months is recommended. Inclusion of the resident in a neighborhood-based peer support group is optional. The case manager should provide ongoing encouragement and provide one-on-one counseling when the resident seeks it or when the case manager considers it necessary. Contact with the worker's supervisor is not necessary unless a problem arises.
- **Low risk.** Individuals at low risk are identified as having at least one barrier. Weekly telephone contact with the resident during the first month on the job and monthly telephone contact for the first 6 months should suffice. The case manager should provide ongoing encouragement but

restrict one-on-one counseling to situations in which the resident is in danger of losing employment.

Retention services for members of all risk categories should include job search help for residents who lose first or second jobs.

Assessing and Delivering Retention Services

A center can take several steps to deliver consistent retention services to residents:

- **Establish a relationship with a local service provider.** Conduct an assessment of local service providers to determine which ones offer the best follow-up retention services for TANF recipients and low-income residents. Providers should not charge for this service if residents are eligible for TANF. Most states offer performance-based contracts to providers based on post-employment retention services delivered to TANF recipients. Federal competitive grants for retention support are also available.
- **Sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)** with the provider regarding specific services it will provide to residents and the duration of these services. An MOU is a written agreement that defines and formalizes a partnership agreement and specifies each partner's role. (See Section 6 for more information about MOUs and partnerships.)
- **Design and deliver onsite training for local staff.** Neighborhood Networks centers can use local providers or nonprofit groups to train staff to deliver case management retention support, but the actual delivery of services should be in collaboration with job-placement providers and employers.
- **Supplement service provider retention support with community volunteers.** Neighborhood Networks centers can fill in the gaps in follow-up retention services by using volunteers from organizations such as AmeriCorps (www.americorps.org) or Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) (www.americorps.org/vista/). Local mentoring groups can also supplement the retention effort.

Evaluating and Upgrading Essential Local Support Services

Neighborhood Networks center staff members should research the availability of supplemental case management retention support services that are essential to helping residents retain employment and move toward self-sufficiency. These services include:

- **Childcare for weekends and late shifts.** Entry-level workers often must work late shifts, overnight shifts, or weekend shifts. Frequently, childcare is unavailable or very costly at those times and residents are forced to leave children with relatives or babysitters. This can be an unstable situation that results in additional stress for workers and can lead to job loss if there are numerous absences. To fill this gap, local churches or community centers can provide volunteers for childcare.
- **Transportation assistance.** Better-paying jobs are often located in areas not accessible by public transportation. Encouraging residents to take and keep those jobs often requires a local initiative funded by employers or the local WIB to provide van service to TANF and low-income workers. Neighborhood Networks staff members should contact local nonprofit providers, the WIB, or employers to see if this service exists. Employers often pool their resources to transport workers on late or overnight shifts from downtown bus stops to worksites. In some cities, there are programs that provide TANF and low-income workers who have a signed promise of a job with donated used cars and free maintenance. Participants must keep the jobs in order to keep the cars.
- **Money management.** Delayed cash flow can present a temporary problem for new employees, affecting their ability to pay rent or utilities or buy groceries. Neighborhood Networks centers can offer two solutions to this problem: (1) encourage residents to attend a local budget management course to learn how to better manage their income; and/or (2) create a rainy day fund to provide one-time cash grants to residents who can demonstrate good cause for a financial shortfall.

- **Substance abuse therapy groups.** Individuals new to the workforce may begin to drink or use drugs after being clean for months or years because of stressful demands in the workplace. Neighborhood Networks centers should be able to direct residents to treatment if this situation arises.
- **Local action teams of volunteers to supplement retention support.** Some communities have organized groups of volunteers who possess expertise about issues pertinent to newly employed residents, such as substance abuse, domestic abuse, and child and adult psychology issues. Some volunteers are neighborhood residents who are willing to mentor or simply listen.

Using Local Mentoring Programs to Supplement Retention Efforts

Research indicates that mentoring TANF and low-income workers improves their chances of success on a new job. Using local neighborhood mentoring groups is a cost-effective method by which Neighborhood Networks centers can deliver added value to follow-up retention initiatives. To create a mentoring program:

- **Establish a partnership with local neighborhood mentoring programs.** Potential sources that may operate their own mentoring programs or offer direction to existing ones in the community include:
 - The local WIB.
 - Retired executives from large local corporations.
 - The local chapter of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), a national organization of retired executives with chapters in most major U.S. cities.
 - A local retirement center or residential facility.
 - The local United Way chapter.
 - Local churches or faith-based organizations.
- **Create a local mentoring program.** Neighborhood Networks centers should establish partner-

ships with community groups to start mentoring programs. Operating a mentoring program is very labor intensive. It requires extensive planning, training, and hands-on supervision of aspiring mentors. High attrition rates are common because many people volunteer without realizing the commitment of time, energy, and emotional support the program requires. There are also frequent mismatches between mentor and resident.

Creating and Implementing Employer Outreach and Information Programs

A supportive and enlightened employer is just as essential to an entry-level worker's ability to make a successful transition into the workplace as an effective post-employment retention program. Regardless of how supportive their retention programs are for residents, Neighborhood Networks centers should supplement those efforts with Employer Information Programs that target the largest local employers of entry-level workers. This program should:

- **Educate employers about hiring the disadvantaged.** This is particularly helpful for employers and frontline supervisors who have lingering negative preconceptions about welfare recipients and disadvantaged people. Neighborhood Networks centers should offer to connect employers with organizations that inform supervisors about the social and financial benefits of employing welfare-to-work participants.
- **Provide mentoring or onsite job coaching.** Inform employers about mentoring or onsite job coaching and the value-added quality it brings to reducing attrition among entry-level workers. To emphasize the value of this practice, Neighborhood Networks centers should provide examples of mentoring best practices.
- **Promote financial incentives.** Historically, employer subsidies have not encouraged many businesses to hire workers with low skill levels or problematic job histories. Recent surveys, however, indicate that small employers may be unaware of federally sponsored training programs that can help defray the cost of training entry-level workers

with few skills. Neighborhood Networks centers should provide a package of information about the financial incentives for employers who are interested in hiring their clients. Centers should contact local WIBs or state Department of Labor offices for this information.

Identifying Better Jobs and Market Niches

There is an understandably high turnover rate in low-wage jobs that have neither benefits nor opportunities for career advancement. Neighborhood Networks centers should help residents focus on targeted local industries and occupations where wages and benefits are improving or where advancement is possible.

There are several options that centers can use to direct residents toward better jobs and self-sufficiency:

- **Identify local companies with a large demand for entry-level workers.** Meet with local companies that have high demand for entry-level positions and offer good salaries and benefits. Make sure the company's hiring requirements are an appropriate match for the skills and academic achievements of residents. Some employers require high school diplomas and specific hard skill sets, such as introductory or advanced computer experience. Local WIBs or local business organizations often can help identify these companies.
- **Encourage employers to offer incumbent worker upgrade training.** Neighborhood Networks center staff members should talk with local companies about the importance of offering skills upgrades or literacy training to their entry-level workers who have demonstrated reliability and a strong work ethic. For example, one company paid for a tutor to come to the company site after hours to provide ESL training to all interested employees. Other companies offer computer and data-entry training and résumé writing classes in onsite resource rooms, which employees can take advantage of during their lunch breaks.
- **Create links between secondary labor markets.** One strategy for creating career advancement opportunities for entry-level workers is an employer consortium brokered by local WIBs or unions. Links would be established between industries in the secondary labor markets that offer low-skill, low-wage jobs with high attrition and industries in the primary labor markets that offer better job opportunities. The objective would be to reduce attrition rates in the secondary labor markets by moving workers into better-paying jobs elsewhere if they successfully perform the entry-level job for at least 6 months.

Providing Employment Search Resources

Entry-level workers with multiple barriers to employment will often move through several jobs before finding employment they can retain and manage well. Effective retention services should include helping workers find new jobs as soon as possible after loss of employment. Research indicates that the longer the hiatus between losing one job and starting a new job search, the greater the chance that the individual will stop looking and return to public assistance. Neighborhood Networks centers should consider offering a variety of services that support residents in search of new employment, including:

- **Establishing local resource rooms for job searches.** Centers could join with the local One-Stop Career Center to allow residents to use their facilities to type résumés and set up interviews, or centers could have resource rooms on site. These areas can also provide places for case managers to do the one-on-one counseling with residents required for effective retention efforts. These resource rooms should be made available for residents to use during evenings and on weekends.
- **Providing additional interview training.** Residents who have cycled through several jobs will need to know how to explain their truncated job histories as they apply for new jobs. Interview training for second or third job searches is

essential. Neighborhood Networks staff members should approach local service providers to ask if they can offer trainers to conduct seminars on interviewing techniques.

- **Establishing peer-based support groups.** A valuable asset to residents cycling through a variety of jobs is a weekly neighborhood-based peer support group. The group offers residents a place to share frustrations, fears, feelings of low self-esteem, and other issues associated with losing a job with others in the same situation. The dynamics of a group like this often encourage and inspire residents to seek and keep better jobs.

Job-Development and Placement Programs

Neighborhood Networks centers can offer residents seeking employment a variety of services and support that will help them develop the job skills they need to become gainfully employed. Additionally, many centers help boost residents over the final hurdle that often sidetracks them from their goal of permanent employment by providing job-placement services. Unemployment agencies often are hesitant to take on those who have questionable job histories or lack the work skills required in entry-level positions.

Neighborhood Networks centers can assist these residents by serving as both employment agent and reference for clients who have acquired workforce skills at the center. Centers can assist residents by:

- **Providing direct delivery of services.** Centers may opt to implement strategies that enable them to deliver their own job development and placement services. The following section includes strategies that every center can apply, as well as more advanced strategies that only centers with a larger staff can institute.
- **Contracting or establishing a partnership with other service providers.** Neighborhood Networks centers might turn to local nonprofit or for-profit job-placement organizations and public entities,

such as the local PIC or WIB, to provide job-placement services for residents.

Components of a Job-Development and Placement Program

Whether a center establishes its own program or partners with another organization to provide a job-development and placement program to residents, a comprehensive job-development and placement program will include the following components:

Evaluating Employment Characteristics

An evaluation of the residents provides the foundation for the employment program's design. The employment characteristics should determine which industries and jobs an employment program focuses on and how it is structured.

Every jobseeker should first prepare a résumé. After reviewing these résumés, job developers will have a better sense of job industries on which they should focus. If, for example, a number of the jobseekers have previously worked as home health aides or as certified nursing assistants, job developers would explore opportunities in healthcare.

Job developers should gather additional information to help expand their residents' needs profiles. They should determine transportation and childcare needs, credit history, criminal history, as well as any other personal problems, such as substance or alcohol abuse, that might deter a potential employer from considering the resident for a job. Job developers should focus on resolving these issues before proceeding.

Identifying Potential Employment Sectors

Identify which employment sectors in the region offer the greatest economic opportunities that are accessible to residents. This assessment should include private business and industry, nonprofit institutions, and government. Take the following steps to assess which employment sectors offer the greatest opportunities:

Identifying and Filling Job Openings

Conduct a comprehensive outreach effort to identify opportunities and place people at a large number of companies. A broad-based marketing approach should help identify businesses or sectors with which centers may develop stronger ties. The two primary approaches to broad-based marketing include:

- **E-mail/mail/fax campaign.** E-mail, mail, or fax a marketing piece to employers and request job orders. The marketing piece should describe the center's services and benefits to the company. Follow up with a telephone call. Be aware that without prior personal contact, this approach may have only limited success.
- **Personal visits.** Visit a company in person to obtain a job order. (A job order provides relevant information about an upcoming job opening.) Set up sales calls when you meet company representatives at business functions or human resources meetings. Some important points about conducting sales calls include:
 - Schedule the meeting with someone who has hiring authority.
 - Confirm the appointment the day before.
 - Bring marketing materials to the meeting.
 - During the meeting, determine what procedures the company follows when hiring entry-level staff, if the company has found it difficult to identify qualified people, and if the company has had problems with turnover.
 - Present the advantages of working with your program, including careful screening of candidates, job-readiness training, follow-up retention services, and cost savings (delivery of higher retention rates, lower recruiting costs, and qualification of tax credits).

If the company has immediate hiring needs, request a job description and information on: the specific requirements of the position, such as high school diploma or lifting ability; benefits, such as wage, health, and retirement; access to public transportation; and the interview process. Close the meeting by

scheduling interviews for three to four candidates. Use the following Job Order Information Sheet (Exhibit 3).

Establishing Relationships with Potential Employers

To connect residents with employment opportunities, Neighborhood Networks centers should develop ties with specific companies or economic sectors. Companies that develop a relationship with a job-placement organization often are more open to extending job opportunities to program participants.

Ways to establish links with a company or industry sector include:

- **Learn the company's business.** Meet with the human resources staff and take extensive tours of the company to develop a detailed understanding of its hiring needs and practices. Participate in company orientations for new employees and learn some of the company's line functions. A job developer who understands a company's business can tailor a training program to meet the company's needs and is more likely to earn its confidence and business.
- **Involve the company in the design of the center's program.** When designing a job-development and -placement program, ask company representatives for suggestions about how to structure the program to meet its specific needs. For example, in response to such a request, ACME Mail Order Company might suggest that the job-placement organization incorporate certain customer service exercises into its training curriculum. Developing a customized training for ACME should better prepare participants for a job at the company and increase the likelihood of receiving more job opportunities.
- **Involve the company in the program's delivery.** Invite company representatives to lead training sessions at the center. Company representatives may conduct technical sessions, e.g., a call center supervisor leading a session on handling problem customers. Other sessions may address more

Exhibit 3. Job Order Information Sheet

Company Information

Name: _____ Address: _____

HR Contact: _____ Title: _____ Phone: _____

Supervisor: _____ Title: _____ Phone: _____

Job Information

Job Title: _____ No. of Openings: _____ Written Description? Yes ___ No ___

Job Duties: _____

Drug Test: Yes ___ No ___ Company Paid _____

Credit Check: Yes ___ No ___ Company Paid _____

Criminal Background Check: Yes ___ No ___ Company Paid _____

Supported Work: _____ Direct Hire: _____

Job Requirements

High School/GED: Yes _____ No _____ Minimum Age: _____ Typing WPM: _____

Keystrokes: _____ Lifting: _____ Driver's License: Yes ___ No ___ Car Required: Yes ___ No ___

Software: _____

Other Training or Skills: _____

Compensation and Benefits

Hire Wage: _____ Bill Rate: _____ Pay Increase: _____

Bonuses: _____ Shift: Yes ___ No ___ \$ _____ Performance: Yes ___ No ___

Paid: Weekly _____ Biweekly _____ Semi-monthly _____ Monthly _____

Health insurance: Yes ___ No ___ Basic Cost: _____

When available: _____ Individual: \$ _____ Per: _____

Provider: _____ Parent and Child: \$ _____ Per: _____

401k: Yes ___ No ___ When available: _____

Vacation: _____ When available: _____

general topics, such as how to interview effectively and how to succeed in the first weeks on the job.

- **Place trainees in internships with employers.** Placing trainees at a company on an internship basis builds strong links with the company. At the close of the internship, the trainees may be retained as regular employees or be ready to be placed with another employer.

Managing the Job Interview Process

After receiving a job order, select candidates who match the requirements for the opening. Make this selection by comparing the résumés and jobseeker profiles to the job description. Then meet with the candidates in person. Some questions to consider:

- Is there a match in the job skills needed?
- Does the jobseeker meet the other special requirements (e.g., high school diploma, related experience)?
- Can the jobseeker work the scheduled hours?
- Can the jobseeker get to the place of employment? Will the jobseeker experience transportation issues?
- Is the jobseeker interested in the opportunity?

After selecting candidates for the interviews, meet with them to describe the position in detail and help them prepare for the interview. Provide them with any useful insights about the company or the human resources manager. Finally, remind the candidate of the following interview requirements:

- Confirm the location of the interview and ask for the best directions to get there.
- Arrive for the interview 15 minutes early.
- Dress appropriately for the interview.
- Ask the interviewer for his or her business card.
- Let the interviewer know if you would like the job.

- Contact the job developer after the interview to review your performance.
- Send a thank-you note to the interviewer following the interview.

Provide the candidate with an Interview Information Summary (Exhibit 4). This summary sheet provides the candidate with basic interview information to avoid misunderstandings about the time, location, salary, work hours, or public transportation access.

Finally, provide the human resources manager with the names of the candidates who will be interviewing and schedule times for those interviews.

Selecting the Best Candidate for the Job

Immediately after the interviews, center staff members should contact the individual who conducted the interviews to determine if the company is interested in hiring or continuing the interview process with one or more of the candidates. During this conversation, try to obtain feedback on all candidates.

Meet with the candidates individually to obtain their feedback on the company, and inform them of whether they have been offered a job. For those offered jobs, determine whether the candidates are interested in the position. These second screenings help prevent candidates from accepting positions that they will quickly leave because of a lack of interest. Second screenings are also important for the placement program since its reputation and credibility depend on its ability to place and retain people in jobs.

Also meet with the candidates who were not offered jobs to share the company's feedback on their interviews so they can learn from their interviewing experiences.

Preparing the Candidate for Work

Before a candidate begins working, review the following areas to ensure that he/she is ready to begin work:

- Childcare.

- Transportation.
- Housing and utilities.
- Clothing.
- Credit.
- Healthcare.

By conducting this review, the center should be aware of any difficulties candidates may encounter once on the job and be prepared to assist if problems

arise. Center staff should also provide follow-up services to ensure that the resident feels comfortable with the new level of employment and to help him/her cope with any additional problems that might occur.

Expanding Relationships with Employers

After making initial job placements at several companies, the center should expand those relationships so that they will receive further job orders from the

Exhibit 4. Interview Information Summary

Applicant Name: _____

Date and Time of Interview: _____

Company: _____

Position Interviewing for: _____

Wage: \$ _____

Schedule of Work Hours: _____

Weekends Included: Yes ___ No ___

Company Address: _____

Public Transportation Available to Workplace? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, bus or subway line:

Directions: _____

companies. Some ways to expand employer ties include:

- Providing follow-up services.
- Involving the businesses in different aspects of the center's programs. Simply inviting businesses to visit or tour the job-placement organization may bolster these ties.
- Organizing ceremonies when the center can formally recognize the company's support and commitment to the community.
- Inviting a journalist or television crew (with advance approval) to interview a worker and the human resources director at a leading company so that the company receives favorable press.

Building effective relationships with businesses and then translating them into job opportunities is the engine of an effective employment program. By establishing these relationships, Neighborhood Networks centers can identify job openings and match their residents with employment. Centers can also provide important proactive follow-up support for placements and employers. Such support is essential to long-term retention and the ultimate success of an employment program.

Career Growth and Advancement Programs

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-skills 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.

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

Providing Career Guidance 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 job developers and case managers to be selective when referring residents to companies for job interviews. Although 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 additional training?
- Is onsite training in advanced vocational skills, GED, or ESL offered?
- Is there a formal schedule of salary increases and promotions for employees based on regular performance evaluations?

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

Using Transition 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, staff members at Neighborhood Networks centers should:

- **Use nonprofit providers and public-sector groups as an information resource.** Staff should collaborate with one of these organizations 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 employment 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 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. Options 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 companies to provide employees with career guidance, work-related instruction, education credentials, and/or credits for post-secondary education courses.

Targeting 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, and then advise residents. To do this:

- **Assess companies and industries.** To evaluate industries, occupations, and employers for the best career growth, research:
 - The number of entry-level jobs filled annually, then determine if 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 WIB, Chamber of Commerce, or business organization; state Department of Labor; or a 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, information technology, hospitality/entertainment/tourism, retail sales (including floor and remote sales/call centers), and back office/administrative. Growth industries will vary by region.
- **Form partnerships with labor unions or large employers.** Unions usually have links with companies that have numerous non-technical 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.

Marketing the Benefits of Providing Onsite Education and Training to Employers

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.

These are some of the benefits:

- **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.

- **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.

Encouraging Employers to Promote Learning 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. To do this:

- **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, ESL, 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 or public transportation vouchers for low-income or unemployed

individuals who want to pursue their education at night or on the 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. Several 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 the kind of training entry-level workers need for promotion is a skills assessment system that identifies core skills.

Identifying 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.** Check with the local/state Department of Labor or Department of Economic Development regarding training reimbursement programs for disadvantaged or low-income workers.
- **State customized training programs for incumbent workers.** Most 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 provide workers with required skills to meet a specific labor need within 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.

Urging 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 center staff 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.** 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 results in lowered self-esteem and lack of motivation to improve the situation.
- **Ensuring that pre-employment training is linked to post-placement training.** Establish training and job links 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.
- **Establish a first-source agreement with employers.** First-source agreements involve employers that benefit from a Community Development Block Grant, public housing funds, or 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 agreements also give 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 hiring preferences.
- Supplying 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 post-employment training.

Encouraging Jobseekers to Become Smarter Job Switchers

Neighborhood Networks centers should urge residents to learn how to apply their skills across industries and occupations so they can make better decisions and improve opportunities for career advancement. Following 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 contact local employment search firms about providing pro bono seminars for residents.
- **Establish resource rooms for residents seeking new employment.** This kind of support is crucial for residents seeking better data on jobs and industries that provide advanced training and career

growth. Neighborhood Networks centers should have at least one Internet-connected computer dedicated to job researching.

- **Provide intensive case management about 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 frequent 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, gives a negative impression.
 - Developing 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 a resident should consider while working on career growth and advancement:
 - Identify a career goal and a timeline for achieving it.
 - Perform current duties to the best of his/her abilities.
 - Find a strong professional mentor within the company and ask that person for advice in achieving career goals.

definition, have low spending power. These enterprises need information about prospective customers and help in connecting with them.

Specific examples of the marketing needs of microenterprises in HUD-subsidized housing include:

- **Measuring demand for a new or existing product.** Microentrepreneurs need to know their customers and competitors.
- **Pricing of products/services.** Inappropriate pricing is one of the major reasons for business failure. Microenterprises often price without fully understanding all their indirect costs and without a clear feel for the price-sensitivity of their market. This can result either in pricing too high and losing customers or, more commonly, pricing too low and facing a loss.
- **Identifying customers and distribution systems.** Low-income entrepreneurs often lack the personal and professional networks that wealthier entrepreneurs rely on to develop markets. This means that their businesses have limited markets and fail to grow to their potential. Most very small businesses are also less able to negotiate cheap transport or the best wholesale prices because they are such small-scale producers.
- **Negotiating contracts and structuring project bids.** Once microenterprises have identified potential customers, they are not always sure of the appropriate business language to use in project bids.
- **Preparing marketing flyers and brochures.** Microenterprises have difficulty in publicizing their services. They generally do not have access to desktop publishing and are often not sure what marketing materials should look like.

Financing Knowledge and Access

Most microenterprises may not be able to access credit from the formal financial system—banks, consumer credit, and credit cards—because they lack collateral or have a poor or nonexistent credit history. Many have difficulty presenting their business ideas to banks, which typically require that borrowers show

a history of repayment of credit card debt, mortgages, and other types of loans to demonstrate that they are a reliable risk. Many low-income people have never had access to credit cards and never owned their own homes. Others have had trouble making credit card payments. Quite a few have no banking relationship at all and conduct all their operations in cash. Often, there are little or no savings to fall back on in business downswings or in the event of personal problems.

Microenterprises typically raise capital from family members or, when possible, on credit cards. The use of credit cards to finance business operations can often result in low-income entrepreneurs getting into serious debt problems. Entrepreneurs in subsidized housing may not even have access to these informal means.

Community development financial institutions and microenterprise loan funds have sprung up to finance microentrepreneurs. One benefit of such initiatives is that they also provide hands-on technical assistance. Many programs include the lowest income entrepreneurs in their target client base. Nevertheless, the geographic and social isolation of many subsidized housing communities has made it difficult for such programs to effectively reach residents.

Management

New entrepreneurs often lack the basic skills and control mechanisms to operate a successful business. Among the most common limitations are:

- **Creating a basic recordkeeping system.** Many new microentrepreneurs do not separate their business costs from household costs. For a business to grow, the owner must accurately determine the costs of providing the service. Otherwise, he or she will not price the service correctly. Without a basic recordkeeping system, the business activity will remain casual and probably not earn enough to sustain the entrepreneur.

Example: A woman who makes and sells baby clothes does not keep any records of the money she makes. When one of her children is sick, she

spends all her money on medication. As a result, she has no funds to buy fabric for more baby clothes and cannot fulfill her orders.

- **Producing monthly or regular cash flow forecasts and financial statements.** Once basic recordkeeping has been established, the entrepreneur needs to consider financial planning. Many microentrepreneurs take a short-term approach, which can undermine the future of their businesses. The woman making baby clothes could have avoided her problem by planning future cash needs and setting aside a reserve of savings to maintain her through unexpected problems. To access credit financing from one of the many microenterprise support programs, microenterprises are required to show financial statements.
- **Legal and tax advice.** Microentrepreneurs tend to begin without legally registering their businesses. Most are intimidated by the complexity of registering and afraid of the related costs. As their businesses grow, however, they may actually benefit from registration because they can make sales more openly or qualify for business-support grants.

Moral Support and Networking

Self-employment can be a lonely enterprise. All entrepreneurs need moral support and a friendly sounding board at times. Some benefit greatly from an informal advisory board or periodic consultation with experienced business owners. For residents of subsidized housing, common barriers include:

- Lack of awareness of and access to existing resources because of distance, not being well-informed, or not having a peer group of similar entrepreneurs.
- Fear of having informal business activity discovered and lack of confidence about how to approach local governments or potential suppliers and markets outside the housing project.
- Lack of experience in business language and personal presentation—down to the most basic level such as professional dress, how to approach

a negotiation about price, or a presentation for a loan application.

- Daily challenges such as access to reliable child-care, transportation, and/or business services, work space, and time management.

Key Components of a Successful Microenterprise Support Program

Microenterprise support programs are extremely diverse. Some focus on a particular group of entrepreneurs, such as immigrants, women, or welfare recipients. Some programs are based locally, while others are spread across the country. Most offer some combination of business training and access to capital. A growing number of programs have experimented with ways to help microenterprises access markets and build up savings and assets.

Features of Effective Microenterprise Programs

The best microenterprise support programs routinely feature most of the following:

- **Outreach into the target constituency.** To be successful, the microenterprise support program must first reach its target constituency. This straightforward principle is actually somewhat complicated when the microenterprise is located in subsidized housing because operators are sometimes very reluctant to bring their businesses into the open. As a result, the program must make a special effort to create a nurturing atmosphere and encourage residents to have the confidence to come in for assistance.

For Neighborhood Networks centers interested in helping microenterprises, offering a menu of support services probably will not be sufficient. Many entrepreneurs simply will not avail themselves of such support without proactive outreach. The center needs to actively promote and market its microenterprise support services and resources. Center directors should survey the needs of resident entrepreneurs before designing programs and

- **Asset building.** Focusing business growth solely on credit can be extremely risky. Many microenterprise programs have developed savings programs to help customers save on a regular basis and build a personal asset base. For example, many programs offer Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). With IDAs, savings contributions are matched by private-sector donations and customers are allowed to withdraw only for investments in education, a home, or their own business.

Neighborhood Networks centers can assume a key role in informing residents about the dangers of taking on unreasonable levels of debt and the tremendous benefits of a systematic savings plan. They can also introduce residents to banks to help them set up savings accounts.

Action Plan for Supporting Microenterprises

Each Neighborhood Networks center can carve out its own distinct set of services to offer microenterprises. Not all possible services will be appropriate for every center, so it is important to identify the services most needed for the local market and keep to a manageable number of initiatives. Wherever possible, the center should bring in outside expertise to strengthen the program.

Determining What Services to Offer

The package of microenterprise support services offered depends on four factors:

- **Capabilities of the Neighborhood Networks center director.** If the center director has business skills, he/she can offer microentrepreneurs personal counseling in his/her area of expertise to complement other more formal training. If the director is computer proficient, he/she might concentrate more on providing training for microentrepreneurs in that sector. Wherever the director lacks experience, it might be necessary to bring in outside help.
- **Funding sources.** These are the primary ways to finance microenterprise support programs:
 - **Government grants.** Funding for adult education and employment training are available from the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services.
 - **Fees for services.** Centers may be able to charge fees for microenterprise support services to individuals who are not part of the Neighborhood Networks community.
 - **Partnering.** Centers can form partnerships with nonprofit organizations that have already accessed financing for microenterprise support activities and need additional participants.
 - **Additional resources.** Neighborhood Networks centers that are recognized by the IRS as nonprofit organizations can use their 501(c)(3) status to expand funding sources, including tax deductions for donors and expanded availability of a wide variety of governmental and private business assistance. See Section 7 for additional information or to learn how to begin the process to seek 501(c)(3) status.
- **Needs of the resident population.** The types of services will depend on how many entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs live in the Neighborhood Networks community. Determining this will require research and outreach since many entrepreneurs in low-income housing are not accustomed to sharing information about their business activities.
- **Other local resources.** The most effective programs introduce residents to outside organizations and microenterprise supports, including accountants, lawyers, computer technicians, successful small businesses, and other business-related parties. The services available in each locality will vary, and the center may want to complement those services with others not available elsewhere. If a center is particularly successful at providing such services, it may find it can sell the service to others outside of its housing community.

Optimal Microenterprise Services to Provide

Under the best circumstances, Neighborhood Networks centers would provide a combination of some or all of the following types of support services for microenterprises:

- Access to technology.
- Business incubator.
- Information resources.
- Broker.
- Ongoing support and encouragement.

Access to Technology

Most microentrepreneurs would benefit from access to computers and other office equipment. Neighborhood Networks centers could establish a business resource center that would ideally be accessible beyond standard business hours. To address security issues, one possibility being explored in centers is a codified lock that would allow approved residents to enter at all times. Some computer centers targeted to low-income populations are practically unused. The keys to achieving a high level of center usage are:

- Long hours of operation.
- Outreach to educate community residents about computer applications of direct relevance to their businesses.
- Staff who can lead first-time users through the systems.
- Software specifically designed for entrepreneurs, including accounting software, desktop publishing to produce marketing materials, and word processing for preparing business plans and proposals.
- Standard computer systems so that new users will not be confused by a new setup or new system at each sitting.
- System for recording individual computer users.
- Equipment that works. Heavy usage of computers leads to frequent occurrence of problems that are

Important Considerations

- The center and individuals will have the potential to earn money.
- The center must develop a system for sharing profits.
- The center will need to develop a business plan that includes a summary of projected income and expenses and a timeframe for anticipated profits.
- The center is likely to need new equipment and the latest software to be competitive.

relatively easy to solve. But if users often find the equipment not working properly, they will quickly become discouraged.

Use of volunteers. Centers could attract volunteers to teach computer, bookkeeping, or desktop publishing classes, and/or provide individualized assistance. Center directors should verify the skills and experience of volunteers and ensure they are able to commit for a specified time—for example, a specific time and day each week for a predetermined number of weeks or months.

Surfing the Web. Centers should provide low- or no-cost access to e-mail and to the Web. The center could also set up a Web site to enable outsiders to find out about the activities of the community and set up a virtual bulletin board for those needing and offering services. Multiple centers may be able to share Web sites or commission other centers to design them. One community computer center conducted clinics to introduce small businesses to the Web. This useful service could be run by a computer-proficient center director or an outside trainer.

Internet marketing. Internet marketing offers entrepreneurs a way to broaden the market for their products and services. Most businesses that operate

on the Internet use a straightforward approach. The business offers the products or services on a Web site where customers can place orders. Internet marketing may be another area where multiple Neighborhood Networks centers can collaborate with each other or with outside Internet marketing services.

Another issue for centers is method of payment. Internet customers typically pay with credit cards. Unless a business has a merchant account, however, credit card payments cannot be accepted. The alternative is to request payment by check or for the center to take on a merchant account for microentrepreneurs to use by proxy. This latter option should be explored only with caution since it is likely to increase the center's legal liability and has account repercussions.

Internet marketing is generally more successful when it is part of a larger marketing strategy. An enormous response to an Internet ad alone, such as was the case with the Virginia coffin maker featured in the sidebar, is unusual.

Business Incubator

Neighborhood Networks centers might consider offering business incubator services. Business incubators offer facilities and/or administrative support to small businesses. The most feasible option is probably to partner with an organization that specializes in running incubators and which would be willing to manage one using the center's space and technology. Before deciding on this type of service, centers should consider three crucial issues:

- Is there an adequate number of entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs in the community to make the service worthwhile?
- Is this the best use of the space and technology given that a large portion of the center might have to be dedicated to incubator use?
- Does the center intend to support start-up businesses? If so, the level of support required will exceed what incubators typically offer.

If a Neighborhood Networks center determines an incubator is a good idea, two types of incubators are worth considering:

- **General incubators.** This incubator offers shared office space where multiple enterprises handle their administrative needs. This is not where the enterprises make their products or conduct their services, which typically remains in their homes. The general incubator provides a receptionist and administrative support, computers, telephones, faxes, meeting space, and bookkeeping services. Neighborhood Networks centers could supplement these administrative services with training in business planning, help with proposals, and other business advisory services. The business would be expected to move out of the incubator after a predetermined period. The National Business Incubation Association has helpful information and advice that could help Neighborhood Networks centers that decide to take this route. For more information, contact the National Business Incubation Association at (740) 593-4331 or visit their Web site at www.nbia.org.
- **Sector-specific business incubators.** If the Neighborhood Networks community has a collection of entrepreneurs in the same business sector, it might be worth setting up a sector-specific incubator. An example is the kitchen incubator operated by ACEnet, which offers licensed cooking and retail space for entrepreneurs in the food industry to develop and test market new products. Special courses are also conducted in this incubator for new entrepreneurs in the food sector. Such an incubator can provide both training and joint marketing and supplier relationships. However, it requires a sector specialist to manage startup and operations and is clearly a large additional expense. Nevertheless, sector-specific incubators may be feasible for centers with experience in supporting microenterprises and partnering with other organizations.

Information Resources: Rolodexes

Neighborhood Networks centers can play an important role in bringing information about helpful services to their communities. The local reference library can be a good source of support. The information should contain not just a list of names of organizations, but also a person the Neighborhood Networks center director has contacted that is willing to act as a liaison. This requires a great deal more preparatory work but greatly enhances the functionality of the Rolodex service.

Among the types of organizations to be included are:

- Local authorities—for business registration and licenses.
- Local small business development centers.

Successful Internet Marketing

A Virginia coffin maker was selling about four handmade pine coffins per month. He decided to advertise on the Web. In the first week, he received 1,000 orders, partly because his coffins were far cheaper than his competition and of good quality. After an initial period of panic, he identified subcontractors to help him complete the orders. Better preliminary planning and market research would have prepared him for the surge in production.

A North Carolina woman had a small home-based craft business selling canvas-backed chairs for children. She put her business on the Civicnet system and got a request for a proposal from a wholesaler for 7,000 items. With the help of her local small business advisor, she put together a winning bid using subcontractors to produce the parts. Without the local advisor, she would not have known how to prepare the bid or how to scale up her production to such large volumes.

- Community colleges that provide vocational training.
- Local Chambers of Commerce.
- City business development offices.
- Small business lenders.
- Women's support groups.
- Training programs.
- Microenterprise support and credit programs.
- Accountants and lawyers willing to volunteer their time or provide advice at reduced rates.
- Banks willing to open relatively inexpensive accounts for microenterprises.

Directory of model forms. Microentrepreneurs would also benefit from easy access to models of commonly used business documents, such as business plans, marketing flyers, proposal letter structures, and pricing models. The Neighborhood Networks center could display sample plans that are most appropriate for small businesses in their communities. Sample forms or applications could be borrowed or modeled from existing microenterprise programs.

Broker

A key role for the Neighborhood Networks center in supporting microenterprise is to link these enterprises with other organizations, such as:

- **Financing sources.** A center could invite microenterprise programs that offer financing to conduct their training, orientation, and client interviews at the center.
- **Training courses.** A center could invite microenterprise trainers to offer courses at the center in business planning, bookkeeping, or marketing. Seminars could also be provided on such issues as legal registration, tax questions, and pricing.
- **Relations with local authorities.** The Neighborhood Networks center director should get to know people in local government with responsibility for

small businesses regulation and programming and find out what benefits are available to microentrepreneurs who register or license their activities. The director can then facilitate relations between entrepreneurs in the complex and the local authorities. As they grow, many small businesses would benefit from becoming more formal, which could help them gain access to government grants, bank loans, and in some cases, a wider range of clients. But, entrepreneurs need to have the advantages of such an approach clearly explained and to have someone guide them through the process of licensing, zoning, permits, and IRS requirements. Government staff can assist in this regard.

- **Accessing markets.** There are various ways Neighborhood Networks centers can help microentrepreneurs access markets:
 - Centers can help microentrepreneurs obtain access to housing authority contracts. Access to reliable contracts from HUD or the housing manager/owner is a solid and safe first step into business. Some entrepreneurs will develop their businesses from that point by finding additional clients for the same service.
 - Neighborhood Networks centers can act as go-betweens for residents and their property managers—advising managers on the types of services (construction, landscaping, car wash, and maintenance) that could be procured from the community and letting residents know what services property managers are seeking. Such a list could be posted at the center, which could help residents create proposals for these contracts. Microenterprise programs might be willing to cooperate in providing loan funds.
 - The center could identify sectors in the community where clusters of microentrepreneurs are operating and help them come together as a group to sell their product.
 - The center could be used as the site for a trade fair, where representatives of business associations and wholesalers or other potential clients from outside the community are invited

to view the products and services offered by entrepreneurs in the housing community.

- The center could collect and display information on nearby companies that show the types of goods and services being made in the served community.
- **Helping purchase supplies in bulk.** For example, through ACEnet, groups of companies producing canned or bottled products buy supplies together to benefit from economies of scale.
- **Helping target-specific sectors.** Childcare is one example of an enterprise that frequently operates informally in subsidized housing. Many of these entrepreneurs may want to expand their operations and become formally established businesses.
- **Supporting peer networking.** Centers can offer their meeting room facilities for groups of microentrepreneurs.
- **Helping microenterprises with savings programs.** Centers might sponsor savings programs directly, providing space for savings groups to meet and arranging with a local bank to administer the savings accounts. The center director would need to survey local banks to determine those that are receptive to a savings program and those that offer the lowest fees and highest return. Alternatively, there might be organizations operating close to the center that already run savings programs and might be willing to operate a program at the Neighborhood Networks center.
- **Apprenticeship programs.** Apprenticeship programs have historically been the main training ground for a wide range of enterprises. In the developing world, microenterprise support programs have reintroduced this idea with great success. Apprenticeships provide low-cost training in useful skills with broad exposure to business realities, and an opportunity to cultivate the social and economic networks needed to overcome obstacles to self-employment.

Neighborhood Networks centers could help offer apprenticeships by identifying local companies

willing to take on unemployed residents for 3- to 6-month stints. The program might be best carried out with a partner, such as a microenterprise support program. In the best apprenticeship programs, companies commit to provide employment and a predetermined period of time per month that the business manager will spend training the employee. The salary costs might be slightly more than welfare payments and might be shared between the employer and the center. In successful apprenticeship programs, residents graduate with a job in the apprentice sector or with the experience necessary to start their own businesses. In operating apprenticeship programs, a major issue is pre-selecting candidates carefully.

Ongoing Support and Encouragement

Whatever collection of microenterprise services the Neighborhood Networks center offers, a key to success is continuing individual support. Often, this will need to be provided by the center director. Among the new entrepreneurs' ongoing needs are:

- **Advice on how to use the Neighborhood Networks center resources.** Provide individuals with an orientation to the center and explain the services available and how they can get started.
- **Helping dealing with specific questions.** While generalized training programs are very helpful to microenterprise development, every participant will still have his/her own unique questions. Unless someone can provide the answers, the fledgling entrepreneur may become discouraged. For example, a business might win the right to bid on a contract with the property manager but not know how to structure the proposal. Or, a young enterprise might find a new category of customer for its service but not know how to price that customer. In another example, a resident might secure a loan from a partner microfinance program but need help in fulfilling the recordkeeping and reporting requirements. Center staff should be prepared to answer these questions or provide access to someone who can.

Working with Other Microenterprise Programs

The training, lending, and savings elements of microenterprise support require considerable experience and capital. It is therefore preferable for Neighborhood Networks centers to cooperate and partner with microenterprise programs rather than try to set up all of these activities themselves. To identify a good partner, the center director should:

- Identify the microenterprise programs operating in the area. The Aspen Institute (www.aspeninstitute.org, (202) 736-5800) and the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (www.microenterpriseworks.org, (703) 841-7760) are good sources of information.
- Set up telephone interviews to pre-select programs based on their initial interest in a partnership.
- Visit selected microenterprise programs and interview their directors. Subjects to cover include:
 - Target market of the program. How well does the program's focus match the center's community? Does the program deal with start-up businesses or only those that have been in operation for some time?
 - Combination of training, financing, and savings. Is the training program credit-led or training-led? If it provides credit, is it group or individual lending?
 - Loan size and terms. What size loans does the program make and for what period? Does the program refer customers to banks for financing? What types of businesses are normally included? Can the program work with start-up entrepreneurs?
 - Repayment rate. What types of collateral are required for loans? Does this match the capacities of potential borrowers in your community?
 - Technical assistance. Does the program support its borrowers with technical assistance once they have started their businesses and taken a loan?

It might be helpful for the center director to take a couple of entrepreneurs from the housing community on the site visit to get their responses on how useful the microenterprise program can be to them.

- Identify an individual at the microenterprise program who wants to take a continuing interest and be the contact for your center.
- Set up a first step for cooperation. The program could run a training course or hold an initial orientation at the center. The director would take responsibility for promoting the program within the community and attracting entrepreneurs to come to a first meeting.

Taking the First Steps

To determine the best package of services for your center, the needs of the community and the available resources should be clearly identified.

First steps would be:

- Check the property rules in the complex where the center is located for any prohibition on conducting business operations out of the housing units. HUD supports microenterprise programs and has no regulations against such operations, but some building owners may. Also, check the local ordinances that apply to the property for similar rules or prohibitions. It is important to be able to explain these rules, or their absence, to residents who want to launch a small business from their homes.
- Establish a group of volunteers willing to be available on a regular basis at the center to provide one-on-one help to entrepreneurs in using computer programs.
- Hire a director with at least basic business and computing skills and a commitment to creating a user-friendly environment for center clients.
- Establish focus groups of residents who run their own businesses. Interview them about their main needs. Get the opinions on which services they would use and why. This will have the double effect of spreading information about the center's upcoming program and enabling the center to tailor services to the needs of its own community.
- Interview other organizations in the region to identify potential partners and other useful support services for entrepreneurs. Identify a contact person at each organization who is willing to act as a liaison with the center. Compile a database of these services that can be easily accessed by Neighborhood Networks center entrepreneurs. The types of organizations to feature include local microenterprise funds, small business advisors, associations and networking groups, women's groups, the local housing authority, computer training centers, childcare programs, and other social service providers.
- Set up partnerships with microenterprise support programs that will be of benefit to Neighborhood Networks center customers. For example, another local computer resource center may be able to run a training program in QuickBooks at the center. Microfinance institutions may want to run training programs at the center, hold orientation meetings for potential borrowers, or sponsor savings programs to help microentrepreneurs build a capital base. Other organizations may be willing to run mentoring or apprenticeship programs for center entrepreneurs or help them network to access new markets.
- Form a peer group if there are high concentrations of people in a similar business.
- Run marketing fairs to display and sell the products produced by local entrepreneurs. Invite outside business associations, such as the local Chamber of Commerce or the Rotary Club, to sponsor or attend the fair.
- Contact the local housing authority to determine its contracting needs and post these at the center.
- Collect good examples of business plan outlines, contracts, QuickBook files, and marketing flyers to give entrepreneurs models to follow in creating their own documents and planning. These would be useful both in paper format and available on the center's computers.

an underserved community, a point of contact, and a potential space in which to hold activities.

Community partners can provide a wealth of resources, including expertise, advice, staff, volunteers, fundraising activities, and donations of computers and play equipment. The right community partners can make it possible to expand and enhance childcare programs or even help secure grants. Potential partners include:

- **Colleges and universities.** Colleges and universities often seek community partners, such as Neighborhood Networks centers, as sites for student internships and volunteer service projects or to qualify for grants (for example, HUD's Office of University Partnerships grants, www.oup.org). Centers also can contact the American Association of Community Colleges (www.aacc.nche.edu) to explore community college partnerships.
- **Service organizations.** Local and national service organizations, such as the YMCA (www.ymca.net), Boys and Girls Clubs of America (www.bgca.org), or 4-H (www.4-h.org), can make resources available to Neighborhood Networks afterschool programs.

Once your childcare program is operational, it will be important to keep in touch with partners and funding sources to sustain the program. Provide them with updates and invite them to functions so they can see the results of their efforts firsthand.

Community partners also can assist residents in setting up licensed childcare businesses. Local community colleges might have programs that help interested residents train, learn local regulations, obtain certification, and develop the necessary business skills.

Property owners or managers are often key partners who provide program space and other essential resources for Neighborhood Networks centers. Many centers have adapted space within the center for afterschool programs. At some properties, owners and managers have provided onsite space for Head

Start programs that service residents and the surrounding neighborhood.

Step Four: Establish the Program

Structure your childcare program to respond to local needs and available resources. Set program goals that are measurable (such as number of children to serve and hours to provide services) and establish a plan to achieve these goals. It can be helpful to create and work with a task force that includes local leaders, residents, and institutions. It is important to ensure that all stakeholders view the program goals in the same way. Tasks include:

- Define how the program will be managed and implemented, and establish roles for the residents (including the residents' organization), property manager, center director, and other stakeholders.
- Assess any renovations or adaptations that might be needed to make the center space work and determine how to carry them out.
- Establish goals specifying measurable outcomes, activities, and deadlines.
- Identify resources for staffing, equipment, and supplies.
- Specify how the program will deal with fees or parent time contributions, staffing, accounting, maintenance, accessibility, and security issues.
- Establish a plan to identify, discuss, and deal with unexpected problems.

Step Five: Market the Program to Residents

Be sure that residents and stakeholders in the community know about the program. Market services to residents by placing flyers in the property management office, Neighborhood Networks center, community job-training centers, and other places that residents visit. Distribute flyers by mail or go door-to-door to talk with families. Set up a table at back-to-school nights to talk with parents, and ask parents to tell others who might be interested in the program.

