

**HIRE Committee
Community Forum
January 29, 2009**

Background

Presentations were given by Mayor Harvey Hall, Mike Shell and Aaron Markovits. Among the information presented were the effect of hiring persons with disabilities on the community at large, the realities faced by an employer, background information on the collaborative and what the future might hold.

The participants were subsequently asked to provide reactions and input on the ideas. Six questions were posed:

- 1 – What are your initial reactions?
- 2 – What are the strengths of the HIRE Committee?
- 3 – What are the weaknesses of the HIRE Committee?
- 4 – What threats are faced by the HIRE Committee?
- 5 – What opportunities are available?
- 6 – What resources will be required for success?

Responses were captured on individual handouts as well as flip charts during group discussions. The transcriptions are attached and have been edited to make them more readable without losing the essence of the ideas.

Insights

Overall the group felt very positive about the purpose, activities, results and possible future of the HIRE Committee. Several things led to this feeling including the involvement of the mayor and the commitment that has been made by several service providers. The group easily saw the value of the collaborative efforts that have taken place and recognized that no other organization provides this service in this way.

There seemed to be a lot of confidence in the expertise of those participating in the HIRE Committee and the foundation that has been built. This is offset by the concern of the tenuous nature of the organization. Little has been done to formalize membership and provide succession planning for the future.

A greater employer presence was identified. This is both in terms of the number of employers as well as greater variety of employers. Small businesses seemed to be ripe for this kind of effort. There is currently no method to gain long-term commitment from employers.

The marketing efforts have been done very well but still there is no clear brand for the collaborative and this is quite likely contributing to the lack of identity in the community. This should be addressed prior to making any large-scale education and marketing campaign.

Overall, the information validated the earlier work on the collaborative charter. The group would most likely support efforts identified to add structure, formality and commitment to the organization.

Items from Flip Charts

Initial Reactions

- Creating a level playing field – equal opportunities
- HIRE is exactly where we need to be – “good bones for the organization”
- Love the integration of the different groups
- I’d like to see more commitment
- We need benchmarks for success
- I like the education component
- Not enough information in the business world
- I like the marketing efforts
- Not sure if we will be able to know if we met the vision

Strengths

- This meeting – stopping to think and set the vision
- Participation of the service providers – walls are dropping
- Commitment of the mayor and other elected officials
- Brings together varied business experience
- Diverse, experienced membership
- “Spot On” on knowledge of the hiring process
- Well prepared job candidates
- “Can Do” group
- It is the only group like it
- Concept that can be replicated

Weaknesses

- A large part of the work falls on Aaron
- Not enough employers engaged - How do we get them to buy in?
- Some employers still think they’ve got to work harder – more of a hassle
- Need ADA involved – better message to small business owners
- Need to validate the financial story regarding tax breaks for employers
- No measure of success that is tangible
- Members have full time jobs
- No clear connection of outcomes improve American standard
- Boundaries aren’t clear
- Brand of HIRE
- The collaborative may not to be able to see the future challenges
- Perception of public about disabilities and what people of disabilities can and cannot do

Items from Flip Charts, cont

Opportunities

- Getting a grant writer
- Better utilization of the website – job seekers can place resumes and employers can place job postings
- More policymaker participation and education
- Leverage members as advocates and educators
- Use change in ADA rules to get to employers
- Networks of members
- Job Expo

Threats

- Absence of funding and resources
- May not be doing all we can
- No succession plans
- We may take on too much
- Employers don't participate consistently
- More candidates than available jobs
- Criteria for employment may get in the way – specifically high school diploma or GED vs. certificate of completion
- Old views of the abilities of disabled workers

Resources Required

- Media – ads, PSA's, Billboards
- Access to various groups including high schools (specifically Special Education areas), Employers and Government
- Funding
- People – business and government
- Facilities for meetings, training, job fairs, etc

Items from Individual Notes

Initial Reactions

- 1. The goals of the HIRE Committee are clear, worthwhile and good for everyone in the community** (This was the most frequently noted reaction).
- 2. There is a great need to educate businesses and others about the realities of hiring persons with disabilities.** (This was the second most noted item. There were comments about making sure the education has a business focus.)
- 3. There is a willingness of participants to work together and cooperate.**
- 4. This effort must have the cooperation of all parties to succeed.**
- 5. HIRE is a valuable resource.**

Strengths

- 1. Network of employers, agencies and government** (this was the most-noted strength; the group was impressed by the commitment of the mayor and appreciated the attendance by the representatives of the other officials; it was noted that working together is the only way to reach the objectives; the group clearly understood the importance of the collaborative effort)
- 2. The goal is clear** (the group understood the purpose of the collaborative)
- 3. The marketing that has been done** (it was mentioned that the story is a good one – both the successes of employees and the benefits that result for both employers and employees; printed materials and in person like job fairs to get the word out)
- 4. This group has a lot of expertise in this area**
- 5. HIRE is the only group like it**

Items from Individual Notes, cont

Weaknesses

- 1. The public generally and employers specifically are uneducated about the issue of hiring persons with disabilities** (the was the overwhelming consensus among the group; items such as the GED vs. Completion certificate, hiring requirements, hiring benefits to employer and community, and the existence of old biases were mentioned specifically)
- 2. Too few employers involved** (this included comments about no small businesses involved, getting more commitment from employers and the ability to keep an employer involved)
- 3. All the persons committed to the collaborative have other full-time jobs** (there was a recognition that Aaron carries the load; the organization needs more formality and structure)
- 4. Most of the current information is agency-focused** (this needs to shift to include messages that resonate with businesses)
- 5. No clear measures of success** (it was recognized that no specific goals or methods of tracking success exist)
- 6. HIRE brand is unclear**

Opportunities

- 1. Business meeting presentations** (most of the group saw this as an opportunity; they saw this helping developing advocates; raising the engagement of policymakers; leverage the mayor; take employees and have them speak to employers; community events)
- 2. An Interactive Website** (several in the group identified the possibilities for a place to place resumes and job opportunities as well as a place to find information about the issue)
- 3. Broader service area** (some believe there is opportunity to beyond Bakersfield)
- 4. Better funding sources** (hiring a grant writer; seeking funds in a unified way; leveraging the collaborative's successes to generate funding)

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Items from Individual Notes, cont

Threats

- 1. No dedicated staff** (too big to sustain over the long-term; needs more structure; if Aaron doesn't do it might end; no succession strategy)
- 2. Perception of hiring disabled persons** (too difficult; too expensive; don't have GED)
- 3. Current general economic conditions** (companies restricting hiring overall; less grant money available)
- 4. Funding** (it will take money to add staff and maintain the website; start-up costs)
- 5. Participation is inconsistent** (employers come and go; no formal commitment required)
- 6. Agencies continue to act in their own best interests**

Resources Required

- 1. Resources** (money; general staff; grant writer; critical to develop outreach and educational methods; website)
- 2. Media/Marketing** (brand; billboards; website; message points; education)
- 3. Business Partners** (the group understands that this cannot be done by agencies alone)
- 4. Access to various groups** (government; business; high school special educators; funders)