**Improving Transition Outcomes**

Tips for Engaging Partners in the Process of Resource Mapping

**The Initial Phone Call**

1. It is always best if you are not “cold calling.” That is, try to have some personal connection to the person you are calling with the request for an interview. At the least, it is preferable to be able to call, identify yourself, your purpose for calling, followed by “My friend, associate, colleague, etc. suggested to me that you might be willing to sit with me for 30 minutes or so to answer a few questions and learn more about connecting youth with disabilities to community, training, and workforce opportunities.”
   * Better yet, you can pave the way for yourself by having the mutual friend or acquaintance tell your “target” that you will be calling and that they would appreciate their friend spending a little time with you answering a few questions learning about this effort to connect youth with disabilities to community, training, and workforce opportunities.
2. If you have no personal contact, (this will usually mean that you are targeting an agency or organization/association, as opposed to an individual), find a way early in the initial conversation to frame what might be their “self-interest” in joining the effort. For instance:
   * For a *business person*, “as a business person, I’m sure you think about how we can develop a diverse, committed and talented workforce in our community, among the people who already live here.”

* + For a *service provider*, “It is evident that you care about youth with disabilities in the professional commitment you have made to work with \_\_\_\_(name agency).
  + For the *faith community*: “We know how important it is for young people to be connected to adults who truly care about them and can be models of what it takes to be connected to and contributing to the betterment of our community. I’d like to learn more, with you, about how to involve people of faith in my work to support youth with disabilities in their transition to more active community life.”
  + For *youth with disabilities and parents*: Take the approach that acknowledges that traditionally they have been seen and treated as recipients of services, rather than resources who can help us do a much better job of supporting young people and their families with this transition. Articulate that we are excited about engaging the leadership and thinking of youth and their families. Remember that people who have been recipients of services typically will not see themselves as leaders and resources, so we have to be very intentional in developing trust and in the language we use to engage them. Asking for their ideas, their best thinking about the issue, what they know from their experiences, their leadership, etc. are ways of engaging youth and parents who have not typically been involved in this way.

1. In either event (cold call or facilitated contact), make it clear that you are asking for a brief meeting (30 minutes, maybe 40 at the most), and be clear about the purpose of your meeting. This will differ depending on your “audience.” For instance:
   * Agencies that provide professional services to youth with disabilities and their transition from school and services will relate to things like “we are making an effort to map the professional resources, as well as informal supports, that are out in our community, and we want to make sure we are very clear about the supports you offer.”
   * With business, “We want to better support youth with disabilities in their preparation for and transition to the workforce, so we would like to understand your organization and what your interest in helping us best support youth in this transition, maximizing their opportunity for success…” the message is “We want to learn more about you, we want to give you the opportunity to understand what we are working to accomplish, we want to appreciate your gifts, and we need each other and these young people to make our community as strong as it can be.”
2. Once you have established the time for the meeting, invite them to set the place, anywhere that is comfortable and convenient for them.
3. Thank them and if the meeting is more than a few days off, you might want to call them or e-mail them a reminder of your meeting the day before.

**For the initial meeting/interview:**

1. Re-introduce yourself, stating your connecting relationship (the person who referred you to them), if you have that.
2. Thank them for their time and willingness to share their thoughts and information with you.
3. Briefly restate your purpose\* and the purpose of your work
   * It is best for the “Leadership Team” of champions to have a brief and consistent “statement of purpose,” a “mission,” if you will, that all know and agree to use in this process so that everyone is getting the same basic message across the community.
   * It is preferable to include a personal expression of your purpose, your passion, your personal interest in this work. It helps build trust, relationship and credibility, as well as invites the person you are interviewing to be more authentic with you.
4. Follow the appropriate format or template, making sure to end with a genuine thank you.
5. Before you leave, be sure you have contact information, re-state their commitment to them, and let them know your plan for keeping them apprised of the results of the mapping process, the big picture progress of your work, and concrete ways that they can enlist their talents / gifts to support this exciting work.

# Notes for the “Champion” Leadership Team

1. It is essential that your “Leadership Team” of Champions establish a process of follow-through with any commitments that are made, particularly those that are made by people who are not paid to do this work. Nothing is more discouraging for volunteers (including the youth and their parents and families) than for us to simply “map” their gifts without finding a concrete way to engage them in a way that is meaningful for *them.*
2. *Remember* that you get to adapt this process (the guidelines here, the interview templates, and the format for documenting the data) to best suit your community, the gifts of your Champions, and your personal gifts.
3. Once you and your Champion Team have established your process, practice the pre-interview and interview processes with one another, cheer each other one along, and go for it! You can go out in pairs if you chose.
4. As your Champion Team convenes regularly, be sure to celebrate your successes and give time and space for discussing and supporting one another through challenges and disappointments. Begin meetings with a “good news” process; some version of “what went well, what are you pleased with, or what are you proud to have accomplished since we last met?”
5. End your Champion meetings with Appreciations for one another and the hard work you are doing.
6. These simple bookends around your meetings (good news and appreciations) not only encourage us to keep going and build community among the “champions,” they are concrete tools that “level the playing field” among professionals, youth, parents, and volunteer allies.

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