

Corporate Partners Council: Public Private Partnerships

Robert Meyer, Katherine Shinholster and Cynthia Jobe

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Issue

In the midst of a slow recovery from a historically severe recession, characterized by high unemployment, excessive government debt, sustained government funding cuts, and growing demand for social programs, nonprofits must look for alternative and creative ways to carry out their missions and achieve social impacts for clients. Collaboration across the private and public sectors is critical to solving our nation's social problems, particularly those related to helping people find employment and working toward self-sufficiency.

It is somewhat anomalous that even in an era of high unemployment employers have difficulty filling positions and keeping people on the job. According to a 2009 report from the Business Roundtable, more than 60 percent of U.S. employers were experiencing difficulties in finding skilled workers at the height of the economic downturn. In the current economic climate, employers need to work together to address the workforce challenges of the new economy. Employers need employees, and nonprofits such as JEVS and others that

work with at-risk populations need employers to place clients in jobs. The cross-sector partnership model works because it allows both corporate and nonprofit partners to advance their respective organizational goals.

Social Innovation

Recognizing the need for a new model to help its clients find employment, JEVS Human Services created the Corporate Partners Council. JEVS Human Services is a large nonprofit in the Delaware Valley providing assistance with skills development, job readiness and placement, vocational rehabilitation, recovery services, adult and residential day services, and in-home assistance, with a particular focus on individuals with physical, developmental, emotional and socioeconomic challenges. JEVS Corporate Partners Council is a bonded corporate leadership group that offers fun networking and educational events for executives while increasing visibility for JEVS programs and opening employment doors for JEVS clients who face barriers to employment.

Benefits for Corporate Partners

Corporations get involved with nonprofits for a variety of reasons but one of the most powerful is the motivation to give back to the communities where they do business. Social responsibility is a big motivator for corporate leaders to get involved.

Business growth is directly tied to the availability of skilled workers and a pipeline of trained workers. In addition to the need for skilled workers, employers also need work-ready employees—employees who can work in teams, take feedback, dress and act appropriately, possess basic math and reading skills and use technology on the job. Through the Corporate Partners Council, members receive a variety of benefits:

- Social and networking opportunities with corporate leaders who have similar interests and social responsibility values;
- “Hands on” opportunities to give back to the communities in which they operate, including group and individual volunteer opportunities;
- A reliable source of well-trained and work-ready employees and vetting of potential employees through a nonprofit employment partner; and
- Customized training services from the nonprofit’s employment and training experts.

Benefits to Nonprofit

The Corporate Partners Council provides a mechanism for introducing new employers to the nonprofit and educating the employment sector about new and innovative training programs. The Council also provides a tool to vet the hiring needs of area industries and, in turn, opens doors to new industries and employers for job-seeking clients. More importantly, by engaging corporate partners they

become advocates for vulnerable clients and ambassadors for the nonprofit partner.

Brett Studner, Co-Chair of JEVS Corporate Partners Council and an executive with Odell Studner Group, a regional insurance company, summarized the benefit in this way: "The beauty of the Corporate Partners group is that it accomplishes a number of JEVS organizational imperatives. Our Corporate Partners are actively opening up doors to get our consumers job opportunities. At the same time our year-long program exposes corporate leadership to the good work of the organization and the real life challenges. As a result Corporate Partners become more active with the organization and become Corporate sponsors and future leaders."

Scalability/Replication

While in its infancy, the Corporate Partners Council is comprised of a diverse group of more than thirty members from a wide variety of industries from throughout the Delaware Valley. The goal is to grow this group to 100 members within the next year to increase the social impact.

Secondary benefits from the Corporate Partners Council, as it matures, could include a pipeline for identifying new nonprofit board members, as well as a source of philanthropic support for JEVS.

For more information about the Corporate Partners Council contact Rob Meyer, Chief Development Officer at Robert.Meyer@jevs.org or Katherine Shinholster, Development Manager at Katherine.Shinholster@jevs.org