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Partners with Business:

Solutions for Creating a Welcoming and Diverse Workplace

People with disabilities represent an untapped talent pool. They are ready, willing, and able to work! The **Partners with Business** model can help you attain greater flexibility to meet your business needs, improve your bottom line, and achieve your workplace diversity goals.

- Research has demonstrated that the turnover rate for employees with disabilities is **8% compared to 45%** for other workers – so hiring people with disabilities can help **reduce employee turnover**.
- Research shows that employees with disabilities have **nearly identical job performance ratings** as employees without disabilities.
- The amount of supervision required is **similar for employees with and without** identified disabilities.
- Polls show that the public likes to patronize businesses that hire people with disabilities. In fact, **87%** of customers say they prefer purchasing from companies that hire people with disabilities.
- More than half of job accommodations cost employers **no money** at all.
- Studies have determined a return on investment of **\$28.69 average return for every \$1.00** invested on accommodations.

Partners with Business is a way to support workers with disabilities to be successful on the job. The Partners with Business model starts with a job developer who works with your business to analyze your workplace needs. The job developer matches your needs to a job candidate(s) with the right skills and strengths. Partners with Business capitalizes on the natural supports (coworkers and supervisors) in the workplace and compliments this natural support with more formal supports when necessary for job success. These more formal supports can include assistive technology, co-workers, or job coaches from a vocational support agency.

The Partners with Business model has two primary paths for workplace support:

1. The **“Natural Supports”** path - The employer provides support to the worker naturally, through co-workers and supervisors, while accessing a Partners with Business vocational support agency for back-up support as needed.
2. The **“Natural Supports Plus”** path – Co-workers and supervisors provide natural supports to the worker but the employer also receives funds to provide extra needed assistance to the employee to be successful on the job. A vocational support agency continues to provide regular check-ins and back-up assistance as needed. In a traditional supported employment model these extra supports would be provided by a job coach from a vocational support agency but in the Partners with Business model, the employer is reimbursed for providing this extra support.

Who makes the decision of which path?

After initial job training, the path will be carefully determined by the employer, the job developer, and the worker. The path will depend on the level of support the worker needs to perform job tasks to the employer's standard and the type of team, co-worker, or supervisor support that naturally occurs in the workplace.

If the Natural Supports Plus path is chosen, how is the rate of reimbursement for the employer determined?

Reimbursement is determined based on individual needs of the worker with input from the employer and job developer. The employer and job developer will perform an assessment of the job duties and the level of independence and job supports needed to successfully complete work responsibilities. Once the extra time spent by co-workers and supervisors to assist the worker is determined, a formula is used based on the employer's costs to provide the support. For example, if a worker needs a total of one hour of intermittent support from a co-worker throughout a 6-hour work shift, the hour of co-worker time spent each day providing the extra support to the worker would be reimbursed to the employer.

What are the advantages of Partners with Business?

- **It is unobtrusive.** There are no outside job coaches to "stick out" or get in the way. Allows managers to have direct and immediate supervision of supported employees.
- **No random new people/job coaches show up to your business.** Agency job coaches often change. Partners with Business ensures greater consistency of support by placing the responsibility for support with the employer. This is preferable to both the supported employee and employer.
- **A truly integrated work setting.** The employee is supervised in a manner similar to other coworkers and has the opportunity to develop independence and co-worker relationships on the job.
- **A welcoming and accepting workplace.** Employees and supervisors are provided training by the vocational support agency on disability awareness and how to support co-workers with special needs.

Where do the funds to reimburse the employer come from?

Job support funds for people with disabilities come from publicly funded sources including state vocational rehabilitation programs under the Department of Workforce Development, Medicaid long-term care services under the Department of Human Services, or school-to-work funds from school districts.

Where is Partners with Business happening?

Partners with Business was piloted in the Madison area and is spreading throughout Wisconsin. Some Partners with Business employers include nursing homes, restaurants, business offices, radio stations, retail settings, country clubs, production facilities, fitness centers, and warehouses. Partners with Business can be successful in any business that is willing to support their employees to be successful!

How can I learn more?

Visit www.wi-bpdd.org/projects/partnerswithbusiness or Contact Shannon Webb at (608)318-0700 or shannon@incontrolwisconsin.org



Partners with Business Overview FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions for Employers Considering the Partners with Business Model

1. How is Partners with Business different from regular Supported Employment?

In a regular, or traditional, supported employment situation, a job coach from an outside vocational support agency comes into a business to provide job training and ongoing support to a worker with disabilities. Some businesses do not want to hire people with disabilities because they find the presence of a job coach to be obtrusive or unnecessary. With the Partners with Business model, the employer provides the necessary supports to a worker with disabilities either through natural, existing co-worker support and supervision or through enhanced support from co-workers or supervisors, for which the employer is reimbursed to cover the cost to provide this support.

2. Who are the partners?

Employers who use the Partners with Business model collaborate with a vocational support agency, or school special education staff to provide training and support.

3. What support is provided by the employer?

Employers supervise and provide training to their supported employees as they would do with their employees without disabilities. However, some employees with disabilities, due to the unique nature of their disability, may need ongoing assistance with certain aspects of their job tasks. For example, a worker might need assistance to prioritize tasks, to monitor stamina or health issues, or to quality check work at the end of his or her shift.

4. What specific responsibilities will the employer have?

- Clearly identify the job responsibilities of the supported employee
- Hire the supported employee at minimum wage or whatever the prevailing wage is for the particular position
- Assign specific supervisors or co-workers to provide support and training as typically offered to new employees of the business
- If extra support is needed, identify which supervisors or co-workers will be providing this enhanced support
- Give staff permission and time to receive training on how to work with the supported employee
- Monitor the performance of the supported employee. Call the back-up vocational agency if questions or concerns arise that cannot be dealt with quickly or directly with the supported employee

5. How do I determine if my business should get reimbursement for training and support costs?

With the Partners with Business model, the employer provides training, direction, and supervision to supported employees as they would for any of the employees in their workplace. If the employer provides support *above and beyond* what is typically provided in their workplace, the employer can explore training and support reimbursement options with the job developer.

6. As a Partners with Business employer what kind of ongoing support can I expect from the vocational support agency?

A vocational support agency – sometimes called a supported employment agency – can provide training to you and your staff on disability awareness and how to best support workers with special needs. The vocational agency staff will also check in with you on a regular basis and can be available anytime you need them for questions or problem solving. If the support needs of the supported employee change, the vocational service agency can help arrange job coaching support if necessary.

7. A Partners with Business Example:

Jenae works at a local community center 4 days a week, 9:00 to 11:30. Her responsibilities include room set up, light cleaning, and assistance with senior meal programs. Jenae highly values her independence and sees herself as a part of the staff team. Jenae doesn't want the stigma of being shadowed by a Job coach from a vocational agency while she is working.

Jenae needs 30 to 45 minutes of support each day to successfully accomplish all her job. With reimbursement, community center staff agreed to provide Jenae with the support she needs each day plus monitor health and stamina concerns.

Partners with Business Agreement FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions about the Agreements Between Supported Employment Agencies and Employers to Provide Co-worker Paid Supports

1. What kind of supports are businesses reimbursed for in a Partners with Business agreement?

Reimbursement to the employer is only for supports that would otherwise be provided by a supported employment job coach. This does not include natural supports that have already been negotiated with the employer that are provided through co-workers and supervisors or supervisory/co-worker supports rendered as a normal part of the business setting that would otherwise be provided to an employee without a disability.

Support that a supported employment job coach typically provides can include:

- Teaching specific job tasks and skills
- Supervision or direct assistance to complete specific job tasks
- Quality checks
- Redirection and reminders
- Social or emotional support
- Problem solving
- Monitoring health and safety

2. How should potential co-workers/supervisors be chosen?

Choosing potential supporters is a collaborative process between the Employer, its employees and the Supported Employment Agency. Potential supporters should be chosen based on their willingness to provide the support to the individual, willingness to let the Supported Employment Agency conduct a background check, and other workplace considerations such as their proximity to the individual, role with the individual, shift availability, etc. More than one supervisor/co-worker should be designated to provide support so a supported employee's schedule and ability to work productively is not impacted by the vacations, schedule changes, and absences of his/her supporters.

3. Why is a background check needed?

State and federal law requires background checks for anyone providing direct supports to individuals with disabilities in long-term care programs. The Supported Employment Agency uses the same background check standards for determining appropriate Partners with Business supports as it does when hiring job coaches for its agency.

4. Who incurs the cost of the background check?

The SE agency covers the cost of the background check(s), similar to covering the costs of background checks for its own new hires.

5. Who will the results of the background check be shared with?

The Supported Employment Agency Human Resources representative conducts the background check and notifies the Supported Employment Agency Job Developer of the results. The Job Developer does not share the details of the background check with the Employer. The Job Developer will only inform the business if the candidate(s) have passed or failed the background check.

Employers should consider the pros and cons of having employees go through background checks and they should provide employees with a no-questions-asked right of refusal to be selected as a paid co-worker support.

Before agreeing to Partners with Business with a Supported Employment Agency, co-workers/supervisors who could be considered as paid supports should be informed of the need for a background check. Employees should have the right to refuse to be selected for Partners with Business supports, and, should they not pass background checks, their employment should not be jeopardized as a result.

6. What if the SE Agency is concerned about asking to conduct background checks on the employer's employees?

Most employers already conduct background checks or, at the very, least check public court records. The service provider should ask the employer for a copy of the background check if they have it. Background checks are a necessary part of the Partners with Business agreement. The results of the background check are not shared with the employer. The SE agency only informs the business if the candidate(s) have passed or failed the background check.

Before agreeing to Partners with Business with a Supported Employment Agency, co-workers/supervisors who could be considered as paid supports should be informed of the need for a background check. Employees should have the right to refuse to be selected for Partners with Business supports, and, should they not pass background checks, their employment should not be jeopardized as a result. Employers should consider the pros and cons of having employees go through background checks and they should provide employees with a no-questions-asked right of refusal to be selected as a paid co-worker support.

7. How is the reimbursement amount to the employer determined?

The amount of reimbursement to the Employer for supports is reflective of the specific needs the supported employee has for co-worker supports above and beyond negotiated natural supports and supervisory/co-worker supports otherwise available to employees without disabilities. This determination is made based on a collaborative assessment conducted by the Supported Employment Agency and Employer of the job duties, level of independence, and job supports needed. The reimbursement amount is based on the amount of time support is needed (in 15-minute increments) during a supported employee's shift multiplied by the Employer's gross costs to provide the support (i.e. the wages and overhead costs of the co-worker(s) providing the support).

For example:

A supported employee works 6-hour shifts, 4 days per week. Over the course of his 6-hour shift, he needs 1 hour of formal, intermittent support throughout his shift to ensure he finishes work tasks,

provide redirection, and prompting to move onto his next responsibility. The Employer determines that it would cost him \$22 (wages, taxes, benefits) for a co-worker to provide this needed support to the supported employee. Therefore, the Employer is reimbursed \$22 for every shift the supported employee works. 18 shifts worked x \$22 per shift = \$396 monthly reimbursement to the Employer.

The reimbursement should reflect the actual hours worked of Supported Employee. The reimbursement rate is increased or decreased based on the actual work hours reported by the Employer to the Supported Employment agency each month.

8. What if, after identifying support needs and negotiating a reimbursement to the employer for co-worker paid supports, the costs for the employer to provide the support is more than the agency cost to provide job coaching support?

Partners with Business shouldn't cost more than traditional job coaching supports. If the co-worker paid supports would cost more than keeping a job coach in place, then a job coach should be used.

9. What does the admin fee for the SE agency cover?

The admin fee is applied for every hour the employer is paid to provide supports based on the expectations of the provider and funding source. It is intended to cover the costs of the SE agency to administer the Partners with Business model with the employer (e.g. checking in with the employer, collecting reports from the employer, dispersing reimbursements). If it is decided the agency will provide some degree of follow-up or follow-along supports to the supported employee, the provider will negotiate an additional rate for this services with the long-term care funding source.

10. In what increments are Partners with Business billed?

Wisconsin's encounter system has increments of 15 minutes, day, or each. There is no code for one hour and there is no specific modifier for Partners with Business. The "each" code could be used for Partners with Business arrangements (which would be a combination of employer reimbursement and admin fee).

11. What kind of training and guidance is provided to supervisors/co-workers who provide support?

The Supported Employment Agency will provide training to the designated supervisors/co-workers who are providing the support, including:

- Overview of supported employment, including values and best practices
- Overview of Partners with Business, including what is covered and not covered for co-worker paid supports and expected outcomes
- Overview of best practices for workplace support/coaching for maximum independence
- Supported Employee specifics – communication and learning style, support needs
- Role and availability of Supported Employment agency for follow along and back up supports
- How to get in touch with Supported Employment agency when needed
- Required documentation (supported employee hours worked and progress reporting)

The Supported Employment Agency will check in with the employer on a regular basis to assess progress and address any issues that may arise. The Supported Employment Agency is also available for additional or back-up supports should the need arise.

12. Who assumes liability for the supervisors/co-workers who are providing supports?

The Employer assumes liability for supervisor/co-worker actions and will not hold the Supported Employment Agency responsible for accidents or negligence resulting from the actions of supervisors/co-workers providing supports to the supported employee.

13. What are the Employer's reporting requirements?

The Employer and Supported Employment Agency complete a Partners with Business Agreement. This agreement lays out the terms of the agreement, reimbursement rate, and responsibilities. It is reviewed every six months and renewed annually. The Supported Employment Agency provides the Employer with an invoice template to complete each month for reimbursement from the Supported Employment Agency. There is a section on the invoice template that asks the employer to provide a short update for the month about the supported employee. This update can include information about the supported employee's work performance and support needs.

14. Is the Supported Employment Agency required to issue a 1099 tax form each year to the Partners with Business employer?

Per the IRS, a 1099 form is required if the SE agency pays more than \$600 per year to a person or business for "other income payments" *unless* the payee is a corporation (including a limited liability company (LLC) that is treated as a C or S corporation). www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1099msc.pdf