MAXIMUS

Moderator: Sabra Gardner
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3:00 pm CT

Operator: Ladies and Gentlemen thank you for standing by. Welcome to Section 503 Community of Practice for Employment Network Service Provider Webinar. During the presentation all participants will be in a listen only mode. Afterwards we'll conduct a question and answer session, at that time if you have a question press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. If you'd like to ask a question during the presentation please use the Chat feature located at the lower left corner of your screen.

If you need to reach an operator at any time press star 0. As a reminder this conference is being recorded Wednesday, May 7, 2014. I'd now like to turn the conference over to Sabra Gardner, Project Director. Please go ahead.

Sabra Gardner: Thank you so much (Mark). Hello everyone and welcome to the second of our Section 503 Community of Practice Forum.

I'll start actually with a quick apology to those that had a negative encounter when they dialed the number to the conference center. There was a typo in the message that went out today, and an immediate correction. And we're going to work to prevent those from happening in the future. And I do apologize for that.

Today's presentation and discussion will focus on building your capacity to connect with federal contractors and their employment opportunities. And then refer qualified Ticket Holder Candidates to those openings.

As a reminder, as you probably know, the Community of Practice forums are held on the first Wednesday of every month at 3:00 pm Eastern Tim. I encourage during the discussion section of today's presentation to please share your expertise, your insights and experienced based tips to help prepare your EN peers to better assist Social Security disability beneficiaries, and taking advantage of these incredibly good changes to Section 503.

(Allyssa) and staff here with me today will be taking notes, and if you have a particularly good idea or a suggestion, we might follow up with a phone call and ask you for some more information. We are however, going to ask you to stay on topic with today's discussion, which is focused on building capacity.

As we go through the call, if we start to veer in our discussion from this topic, we're going to ask to put those thoughts, questions and concerns into a parking lot. We will capture our parking lot input and work with future presenters to make sure that we cover all of your discussion needs.

With that, OSM is incredibly impressed to welcome Pam Walker, the CEO of Alliance Professional Services, LLC and in Employment Network as today's topic presenter and facilitator.

Pam is an EN representative on a Section 503 Tiger Team that was convened last fall by Bob Williams, and has previously served as a trainer for us on the Section 503 Rule during the March All EN Call where she began the conversion on capacity building.

Pam is the Secretary of the Nation Employment Network Association, better known as NENA, and serves as a member of the OSM EN Operations Workgroup.

Pam thank you so much for your willingness to continue and be with us today. Continue the capacity building dialogue you initiated during the March All EN Call. And with that I will turn it over to you.

Pam Walker: Thank you so much Sabra, and good afternoon everyone. I really appreciate the opportunity to share additional information about getting involved in 503. And there will be several question and answer sessions throughout the presentation, so if you have a question that pops up you can either post it in Chat or just jot it down on a piece of paper so you don't forget what it is, and we'll be glad to answer it if we can.

Today we'll be discussing on how to get involved by developing and implementing a solid strategy that includes capacity planning and partnering with other organizations to increase success.

As part of the conversation we will be visiting methods to determine the best outreach approach for your organization, and that would be based on your organization's business model and the time, staff and marketing resources available to you.

We will also be sharing methods for researching and identifying federal contractors and their designated contacts. And then reviewing the contractor's business information to find businesses that are a good fit for your organization.

Before reaching out to these contractors it will be necessary to develop marketing materials and develop a marketing strategy. So we'll be discussing different ways to reach out to the contractors with marketing as well.

The purpose of getting involved in Section 503 is to place qualified Ticket Holders into great jobs. We'll cover methods to find and match federal contractors open positions with qualified Ticket Holders during the call today.

And as Ticket Service Providers we need prepared our Ticket Holders for participation in 503. Ticket Holders will need to have a basic understanding of 503 so they know what to expect during the application process and so they can make informed decisions with regard to disclosure versus non-disclosure. So we'll be touching on that as well.

To maintain a good working relationship with the federal contractor partners, it's imperative that we only refer well qualified candidates for open positions. Establishing a solid job screening process is extremely important and we will visit some ways to handle the screening process.

After putting so much effort and energy into the - preparing and participating in 503, you'll want to track your success. So we'll talk briefly about some easy ways to create a method for tracking the referrals and the outcomes of those referrals. And I think with that we can go to Slide 3.

So to begin, let's think about the best approach for your organization and things you need to consider. First of all, "What is your goal, how many placements would you like to make realistically?" I know we'd all like to have, you know, thousands, but we have to come up with a realistic number.

"How many Ticket Holders do you currently have assigned and what are the primary types of jobs they're seeking?" Those are questions you need to ask as you start this process.

You also need to consider how many staff hours are available, "Who is the best person to handle the market efforts, and how much can they contribute? How many job placement specialists or career coaches are available to recruit, train, screen and refer applicants? If resources are limited, at what point would you need to bring on additional staff and what type of approval process would they require, and how long does that process take?"

You need to consider the time for security clearances, and you know, that's if new staff is coming on board, or your using people that have not been cleared, if they're going to work directly with beneficiaries. There may be somebody already on staff who can assist until additional help was available, so that's always something to consider.

Once you make it through that step then you need to look at a budget. Most of us do not have unlimited funds for projects so we really need to determine how to get the most out of what we spend. So think about the area you serve for just a minute.

Are you in a city or rural area? Are there a lot of businesses close to you or in your area? Do you have facilities where you can meet with groups of people? Are there community resources available where group meetings could be held? And thinking about that, and based on the goals, the staff, the budget, you know, what outreach approach would really work best for your organization? It's going to be different for everyone, okay?

So based on your thoughts, what do you think your best approach for participating in Section 503 would be? Just a hint, it's best to start smaller than you initially envision and build up from there.

If your best approach to 503 is working with a very small company, a mid-sized company or a very large company, you need to know that before you start making a selection for outreach and marketing.

Ideally it really is best to start small, but I think what you do is you think big and you build up slowly. The old thing, "Don't bite off more than you can chew," is really applicable to involvement in Section 503.

So start small while creating partnerships, both with employers and other service Ticket Providers, and give yourself an opportunity to work out any issues with the processes and handle the increased capacity gradually and at a comfortable pace.

Keeping in mind the answers we just reviewed will help you determine what organization can comfortably handle now and what your organization can develop for the future and the outreach start up. So let's move on to Slide 4.

The next step of the process is to identify the federal contractors who are the best fit based on the initial goals. This is going to take some time and research early on, but I assure you, I can speak from experience, that it will be time well spent.

You need to remain steadfast to your initial goals during this research period, look for federal contractors who meet the requirements important to your organization.

You can find information about the size of the company, what services or products they provide, and approximately how many jobs they fill each year. If there's any recent news about layoffs or expansions, that is also information that you would want to consider.

Once you start the process and you start looking at these federal contractors and trying to determine who you want to contact, look and compare the number and types of jobs available to the typical skill set of the Ticket Holders you primarily serve.

Most of us have Ticket Holders that are kind of all over the board, you know, looking for different jobs. But many times an organization will have primarily unskilled jobs, and then you have other organizations who may have, you know, very skilled or technical positions that they readily have available. And a lot of that depends on your location within the country.

So if you've determined, for instance, that the majority of your Ticket Holder base is looking for factory work or skilled labor jobs, look for those federal contractors who are most likely to have those types of jobs, or positions, available.

On the other hand, if your ticket base is predominately individuals with heavy information technology or programming skills, you would want to look for a federal contractor that handles software development, programming or even business consulting. And you might find that, you know, that organization is a better fit for the types of Ticket Holders you're trying to place. So just something else to think about there. Okay, let's go to Slide 5.

Okay, there are several ways to locate federal contractors and unfortunately there's no one source that will provide everything needed, but there's a couple that come pretty close. So we're going to visit several of these resources.

On Slide 5 there is a screen there with a link and this is the Federal Procurement Data System Next Generation, and it's a federal site. And from this site you can obtain information about the list of Top 100 contractors by fiscal year. You can see federal procurement reports to see how much contractors were paid. And there's also an area where you can pull up small business contracting reports, and even get information on sub-contractors, so that's a very good site to use. Slide 6 please.

Slide 6 is a second resource, and this is the General Services Administration link, and it provides a list of the very large prime contractors who have very, very large contracts. It's non-construction federal contracts valued at over $650,000, or federal contracts for construction valued at over $1.5 million. So those are going to be basically your very, very large contractors. Slide 7 please.

And this is the one I really get excited about, and my personal favorite and the one that I use the most. Every year as a federal contractor we have to go into SAM.gov and update our information, because we are a federal contractor. And all federal contractors have to do that, regardless of how much business they do with the federal government, they're still required to register with the federal system for award management, also known as SAM.

They have to update those records annually and anyone can research the database, a login is not required to do the search, and this is really the only place that I know of where you can search and locate federal contractors using specific filters such as the city and state. And you can even search by zip code. So if you're just beginning to develop a list of potential federal contracts you want to contact, I recommend you start here.

Not all of the contractor on this site will fall into a category where 503 is applicable to them, because some of them will be very, very small contractors.

But it could still be a benefit to reach out to them if they appear to be a fit for your organization.

If they have contract awards, you know, over a certain amount, they're going to have to have an affirmative action plan anyway. So they're going to be interested in hiring persons with disabilities. So if they have jobs maybe they'll let you assist them in filling those.

And if all goes well, connecting with them could lead to a great reference when you approach another contractor who may fall under the revisions of 503. So if you need to start small, that's the place to begin your search.

So whichever system you use, and whichever link you use, to put all the information together, you need to come up with a realistic list of people that you would like to contact and that you think might be a good company for you to partner with.

So let's talk about Slide 8. Once you have that list, take a look at the Web site and the SAM.gov site, you will be able to click on - after you get to that site and you do your search, you can get additional information on each of the contractors, including their Web site and I think the contact phone number. So there's a lot of information you'll get from there.

So once you get started with the list, review the federal contractor's business information. In addition to the SAM site you might want to take a look at their Web site and view their current open position, determine if you have anyone qualified for any position that they have open.

If you do, that's really a great way to open the conversation with them, by contacting them and saying, you know, "Here's who I am and what I do, and it looks like I have someone that may be qualified for this position you have open."

In addition, you'll want to use the other sites, the Federal Procurement Data System and the General Service Administration site to find out how much they were paid by the government for services or products. And that will tell you whether or not, generally it will tell you whether or not, that business meets the guidelines established under Section 503.

So now that you've done your research, you have your list, you know what needs to be done, narrow that list down and determine which of the federal contractors you'd want to market to.

And I recommend that you place them in priority order, especially if you're small and you don't want to send out too much information at one time, because everybody may come back and say, "Yes I'm interested." And then you may not have capacity yet, or have all the bugs worked out, on how you want to work the partnership. So start with one, talk to them, and if they're interested, you know, carry on to come to an agreement. And if Number 1 doesn't work, move onto Number 2.

As soon as the marketing materials are available, that's when you want to make the initial contact. A phone call or a phone message followed up by an email or a mailed marketing letter or material is usually the best way to begin the communication.

I usually make a phone call or leave a message introducing myself and letting them know that I'm either sending an email or marketing material in the mail. The communication that you should have with the contractor should always include information about the Ticket to Work Program.

I'm constantly amazed at how many employers are there that have never heard of Ticket to Work. And so this is our opportunity to educate those federal contractor employers.

If there are any special services or resources provided by your organization you want to be sure to include them in your marketing material. And, for instance, if on-site job coaching is something that you offer, or specialized training is something that you offer, be sure to mention that in your marketing material.

Explain how the federal contractor can work with your organization. Now they should know who you are and what your business does, but they probably don't have a good idea about what you can do for them.

So there's a lot of different options. The partnership with them can be as simple as them just sending you a list and minimum qualifications for jobs they need to fill, or they may rely on you to recruit, prescreen and provide candidates for specific positions.

So, you know, you really need to let them know what you are capable of doing and able to do for them, and then work with them to determine, you know, how much or how little, participation would be.

Federal contractors seem to really be concerned about being able to identify individuals with disabilities, and now they have to track that. You know, "What recruitment efforts did they make? How many people applied? How many people were interviewed, and how many were actually hired?" So we're in a great position to help them do that, and do it without additional cost for their company.

I like to make it known up front that I'm not trying to sell them anything, because a lot of times, you know, they'll think, "You're just somebody trying to call and get business." So let them know up front that the services you provide do not have to be paid for by them, that you're offering to help them at no cost to meet the Section 503 goals.

Now that you've indicated you're willing to offer services for free, you have their attention. But you know how sometimes we get those calls and it's marketing calls and they offer great deals or vacations for free, and we're sitting there thinking, "Okay, what's the sales bit? What is this going to cost?"

So it's always good to explain to them why it's free and why they don't have to pay. So that they don't think it's a gimmick, basically.

Federal contractors need to describe - or need to know what the mutual benefit is when working with an employment network. So explain to them that you'll be compensated when the people that you assist are employed and remain employed, which is why it's important to you for the job applicants to be well qualified and able to successfully perform the duties of the positions that they're applying for.

It doesn't do you any good if you send someone who's not qualified and then, you know, they work a week and they lose that job. So you're in it for the, you know, for the long-term, and the federal contractors need to be aware of that. So let's move onto Slide 9.

Let's talk a little bit about those marketing materials that will be needed in developing an overall marketing strategy.

The first step to developing a successful marketing plan, now that you know how to make the first contact and the things that you need to say on the front end, you're going to follow up with the marketing material.

And the first step we discussed was determining who to market to, okay? From what you've gained through the research, develop an introduction that includes just, you know, a three to five minute introduction that includes a description of the Ticket to Work Program, who's eligible for the program, the benefits of the program, specifically individuals with disabilities who are ready to return to work.

And that's important because you want the contractors that you are contacting to know that the people that you will be sending them are ready to return to work, and they're qualified.

So it's important to include the information about Ticket, that it's an outcome based program, and you know, we're not paid unless the individuals are successful. And just keep reiterating that point so that the federal contractor understands that, you know, basically we have some skin in the game and we want it to work. We want to help, we want it to be a win-win situation. So a successful job placement creates success for everyone.

You will also want to provide basic information about your organization. "How long have you been in business? How many beneficiaries you've served over the years, or currently served?" Indicate whether you partner with, or have a working relationship with other service providers. Indicate the services that you provide and the value of those services. List the specific services the organization provides to beneficiaries and the specific services available to employers.

If you're not able or willing to perform some tasks, don't include them in your marketing plan. In other words, if you just want a list of open positions that they're willing to disseminate to you so that you can send it out to your Ticket Holders, then say that. It's better to lower expectations then deliver and deliver big, then create high expectations and then under-deliver. So make sure that what you put on the marketing - that printed marketing information, is a true picture of what you can provide.

If there are specific resources that you have available that you use, tools and processes just to prescreen candidates. For instance, if your organization uses programs such as ONET or (ProveIt) or even if you provide keyboarding or 10-Key speed tests, maybe you assist with career analysis or other types of testing. Let the contractor know what you do and how you prescreen.

Then again, be able to provide examples of different ways the federal contractor can work with your organization for mutual benefit.

A formal agreement is not required unless, you know, you and the contractor determine to enter into one. Some examples could be anything from, like I said earlier, just obtaining a list of the contractor's job openings in advance of those jobs being posted.

I mean if you can get them before they're made available to the general public, that's always a plus. Maybe you can get it filled before it's posted, which would be a very good thing.

You can offer to post jobs, available jobs, at your Web site. You can share openings with other Ticket Providers to, you know, for services. And especially if a contractor has multiple locations and maybe you're in one, but they have three other locations across the country. If you can partner with other employment networks who are in those locations, you may be able to get, you know, more placements by working with them. Because they may have qualified individuals in those cities when, you know, when you don't.

You also need to include the process for handling disclosure related issues, that needs to be worked out on the front end, because you will have some individuals who choose not to disclose, and others who, you know, are fine with it. So that's something that you need to work out with the employer to see if there's a way to send applicants without disclosure. So all of those things need to be in your marketing plan. You've got - let' go to Slide 10.

So you've got your introduction lined out, you've got the information needed to create your marketing materials, like formal letters, flyers and brochures, and you have information for employers created now that you can add to your Web site.

Regardless of the format used, always be sure that your organization's name, primary contact, title, address, phone number, email address, all of that information is included.

And if there's multiple contacts, then provide information that allows the contractor to determine who they need to visit with instead of having to call for three or four people.

For instance, if your local contact person for the federal contractor may be assigned within your organization based on the federal contractor's zip code, of the size of the federal contractor's company.

If you're a national provider, then you may have different contact people depending on where the job is located. You know, maybe it's in the North and

South and the East and West, so you would want to show all the contacts on the marketing material so that the federal contractor can easily find the next person.

Another option for getting federal contractors to contact you is to provide what we call, an interest form, at your Web site. And it's much like the Ticket Holder interest form that many of us have on our Web site, but it's for employers.

So that way if they go to your site and they see what you do after receiving some marketing material, they could go out to your Web site, complete an interest form, and have the person that they need to speak with contact them, instead of you know, playing telephone tag and trying to track down the correct contact person. Okay, let's go to Slide 11.

If the plan - if your plan is to mail out marketing material information, it's going be necessarily to make some calls to obtain the name and contact information for the Affirmative Action Officer, the Human Resource Director or the HR Manager for that federal contractor.

Obviously, mailings are only of value if they make their way to the decision-makers, so you're going to do a little more investigation and determine who the decision-makers are.

At the time you provide the marketing materials you can use tips to make it easy for follow up appointments to be scheduled. For instance, if your organization is using an appointment scheduler at your Web site, you can include that information on your introductory letter and invite the federal contractor to go online and schedule their own appointment to meet with you one-on-one.

If you're sending out multiple letters to federal contractors during the marketing process, maybe you set up a time for a free webinar or teleconference, and include that invitation with the marketing material that you set up. That way you can speak with multiple people at one time and share all of the information with them, and then the follow up if they're interested in the one-on-one discussion. But whatever plan you develop, make sure the information, the contacts you make, are well thought out and organized.

Prior to any one-on-one contact with the federal contractor, you really need to learn as much as you possibly can about their business, especially if they expressed an interest. Take steps similar to those that you recommend to your Ticket Holders who are preparing for an interview. Determine whether the company is a federal contractor or sub-contractor, the number of people they employ, you know, the amount of the federal contract, some of the things that we previously talked about.

Make sure you understand the nature of the products and services that the company provides. "Do they have more than one location?" If they do, find out where it is, and it may be helpful to know this, because you may either have a contact or have a relationship with another Ticket Service Provider in the locations where their other facility is located.

So it's also helpful to determine if they're currently hiring and what types of jobs are currently open. And then you'll want to be prepared with the information and topics for discussion to keep the conversation rolling.

Share some information about your organization, have a success story or two to share, that's always good during those types of conversations. And you can share the Web site so that the federal contractor can go out and they can view those videos of success stories and learn more about the Ticket to Work Program.

So - and if there's signs of mutual interest you're going to want to try to schedule a date and time for a follow up meeting with them as soon as possible.

At this time let's take just a brief break and see if there are any questions in Chat about any of the information we've covered so far.

(Sally): Pam, this is (Sally). We don't have a lot of questions relevant to this. Let me see, I'm looking at the Chat now - laws could be viewed. "What laws or acts can be used on Congress' Web site to learn about Ticket to Work programs and current regs?"

Again, you could probably - you can look on the Social Security Web site, you can look on the Ticket to Work Web site, and you can call your account specialist and they can provide you more information.

But I will say that when Pam is talking about, you know, having a 3 to 5 minute speech about the ticket, we want - it should be very high level, just to give them a clue of what the Ticket program is about, that you're working with beneficiaries. And there's a lot of emphasis on the fact that you provide that ongoing support after job placement.

Other than that the questions have not been a lot about the 503. So how about people out there in the audience?

Operator: Would you like to take phone questions?

Woman: Sure.

Operator: Ladies and Gentlemen if you'd like to register for a phone question please press the 1 followed by the 4 on your telephone. You'll hear a three tone prompt to acknowledge your request. If your question's been answered and you'd like to withdraw your registration, please press the 1 followed by the 3. One moment please...

((Crosstalk))

Operator: ...for the first phone question. Okay, and our first phone question comes from the line of (Gordona Uniti). Please proceed with your question.

(Gordona Uniti): Hey, you had mentioned those Web sites, the sam.gov and the other ones, do you mind giving me those specifically? I am not able to see the slides.

Pam Walker: Certainly, and the information will be posted at the Ticket Web site...

(Gordona Uniti): Okay.

Pam Walker: So that you can pull it up from there. They're rather lengthy but if you've...

(Gordona Uniti): Okay, okay.

Pam Walker: Yes, but I can either email you or you can email me if you'd like, and I'll be glad to (unintelligible)...

(Gordona Uniti): That'd be great.

Pam Walker: ...you an email, okay?

(Gordona Uniti): Okay, what's your email address?

Pam Walker: Okay great, great. Just do that and I'll be glad to copy the links and send it over to you.

(Gordona Uniti): Okay, thank you.

Pam Walker: Sure.

(Sally): Let me add to that, this is (Sally), that if you go to the - your Ticket to Work Web site and you see - go to the Information Center, you'll see the dedicated 503 page, when you land on that and click on that 503, the first thing that will come up is an entire page about locating federal contractors with all the resources that Pam mentioned, except for SAM.

(Gordona Uniti): Okay.

(Sally): I have to say, "Pam uncovered that one, new one." But there's other ones there too, including...

(Gordona Uniti): Okay.

(Sally): ...a step-by-step guide on how to use the Federal Procurement Data System.

(Gordona Uniti): (Unintelligible) great.

(Sally): So all of that information, including the direct links, are on that Web site.

(Gordona Uniti): Yes, okay. Thank you so much.

Pam Walker: And it's a great site to go to, there's so much information there. (Unintelligible) extremely, extremely helpful.

(Sally): Pam, we have another question I'll take from the - let me kind of interpret this a little bit, from the Chat.

Pam Walker: Okay.

(Sally): Basically the question seems to be, "Is there really a specific 503 contract - contact with each federal contractor?"

Pam Walker: Well, they are supposed to have a designated contact, but I have not found anything other than SAM where there is anyone officially designated.

But if - a lot of times if you go to a company Web site it may have the name of their affirmative action person or affirmative action contact and that would be a good place to start just to reach out and see if they have a designated person for 503. And it may be that the affirmative action contact is the person that you need to visit with first. You know, if you visit at a high level it can be filtered down.

(Sally): And let me add to that that the contractors that have $50,000 or more in federal contracts and 50 or more employees, have that 7% utilization goal; 7% of their entire Workforce is supposed to be individuals with disabilities. And they have the requirement to do an affirmative action program. And part of that affirmative action program is to have a designated person in charge of that program.

So if I couldn't find it through the Web site or something, I would probably just pick up the phone and call the company and just say, "Could you tell me who your affirmative action contact person is?"

Pam Walker: Absolutely. And there's some great information also posted at the Web site - I guess it's posted now, from the - a Community of Practice Forum call on April 2 that (Susan Webb) did. Is it posted out there yet?

(Sally): The PowerPoint is there.

Pam Walker: Okay.

(Sally): The FAQs from the chat and the call are being sent to Social Security for approval, probably this week. So hopefully...

Pam Walker: All right.

(Sally): ...they would be posted maybe by the end of next week.

Pam Walker: Yes. If - yes, if you missed that call I highly recommend that you go back and listen to it or read the transcript, because there's a lot of valuable information in there about 503 and the intent of 503 and which - how to determine, based on the federal contracts, whether or not they fall within that 503 requirement.

(Sally): And the other thing is, just to let you know, there is a recording of the first 503 COP, and this one's being recorded too. All of that is on the 503 page on our Web site.

Pam Walker: Yes.

(Sally): Somebody on the...

Pam Walker: (Unintelligible).

(Sally): Pam, I was going to say somebody on the Chat asked about, "Do you know companies in California that are 503 contractors, each individual EN is going to have to their own research or partner with other ENs to do research. But I think all of the resources that Pam has mentioned, and the ones on the 503 page, you can narrow your search by state, by county probably, city -- those kind of things.

Pam Walker: Yes, the best site for that person to begin with would be the sam.gov site that's on Slide 7. And from that site you can put in, you know, city, state, zip code, type of company. I mean there's a lot of different fields that you can fill out to narrow it down to the ones - you know, in an area that you're interested in.

I love that site. I didn't love it until 503, but I love it now. All right, if there are no other questions we'll move on to Slide 12 and come back to more questions in just a little while.

Okay, we've made it through the process determining the capacity and how to find the federal contractors we want to work with. So now we're at the point where we've already notified the federal contractors that were interested in assisting them. And we're at the point where we need to sit down and do the one-on-one discussions, okay?

From the marketing that you've already done, you should be able to have a pretty good idea whether or not a federal contractor is interested, so the next step would be to have that one-on-one discussion with them, determine for sure that they're interested, and try to come to a basic understanding of how working together would be of benefit.

There's a lot of benefit that Ticket Providers offer that are not offered through other sources. And one of those (Sally) mentioned just a couple of minutes ago, and that's the Ongoing Support.

As a Ticket Provider, you know, when we help someone find work and they begin working, we don't just leave them, we're still there to see them through the process and work through any issues that they may encounter with a return to work.

And that's a huge benefit to employers because it's very costly to hire and train someone and then have to let that person go and bring someone else in, you know, to retrain. So you know, if we can work with the employer and with the individuals to help that person retain employment, it's of benefit to everyone.

So put together some notes after the initial meeting and basically reduced what you discuss to a written plan with projected dates. And then submit it as a proposed plan for working together.

The plan should outline how the employer's going to provide information to you and what your organization is going to do with the information; how the applicants will be referred to the contractor; and what processes the contractor is going to take to ensure confidentiality of the applicant's disability, you know, if disclosed.

You know, you want to be able to - in some instances, okay, if you're working with an employer, you may be sending those applications directly to an HR manager and the disability, if disclosed, would be known by that HR manager.

But if that HR manager is sending that application to a department manager to fill the job, it may be that that department manager is never advised that this is a person with a disability.

So you know, you want to kind of figure out what the process is so that you have a process for sending people or referring people who have chosen to disclose a disability but you also want to make sure that if a person chooses not to disclose his disability, you know, that they just either need to go through the regular process or you're in a position to explain to them if they disclose, you know, how that information would be handled and who would know and who would not know because it could impact the decision that they make to disclose or not disclose.

So put all those things down in writing. And then it doesn't have to be anything formal, you can just lay it out in a cover letter. You know, "It was nice meeting you and based on our conversation here are some things to consider, you know, in working together." There's no need to be elaborate, just keep it simple but lay it out.

You can and should create a more in-depth process on how to handle the workflow internally. And keep in mind that the more your organization does to firm up a plan for working with a contractor, the more inclined they're going to be to participate with your organization.

On the other hand, if working with you is going to create an administrative nightmare for them the chances of having a successful relationship is unlikely. So you know, don't inundate them with paperwork. Give them what they need to know, suggest a plan, get their feedback to come up with a final plan, but don't expect them, you know, to write the plan for you. You need to do that work to make it easier for them so that they can see that you're in earnest and that working with you is going to be of value to them.

As a Ticket Holder, most of us generally have more Ticket Holders than we do jobs, but by participating in Section 503 we're going to find, I believe, that the reverse may be true. So we're going to talk next about finding the Ticket Holders.

But before we do let's check one more time and see if there are any questions. (Sally), anything in Chat?

(Sally): No, I don't think we have anything now, so we can open it up for questions. Or the other thing is folks, not only questions, if you have additional tips on how you would approach this or how to embellish on some of these steps that Pam's gone over, we're looking for your input too.

Pam Walker: And I know there are some successful ENs out there who have established relationships, you know, with employers. So yes, we would love to hear from you. So all right, we'll finish up and then open up the lines one more time. Slide 13 please.

Okay, federal contractors fill a lot of jobs. I'm currently receiving weekly and biweekly job openings from several contractors. And even though I have a large number of Ticket Holders assigned, I am not able to fill these positions. It's either because a couple of them are national and I may not have qualified Ticket Holders in that area.

And contractors don't - federal contractors when they're partnering with us, they don't expect us to fill all of their positions, but it's important to make a good number of referrals to help them fill positions so that they feel like working with us is of benefit to them.

We have to be careful about making the referrals because if the referrals are not well-qualified, if they're not job-ready, then the contractor will - may choose not to continue working with our - the organization for very long. So when you look at all that, and the need to find well-qualified individuals to fill a large number of jobs, it becomes necessary to find ways to recruit beneficiaries that are qualified to fill the positions.

And there's a lot of ways to accomplish this so I'm going to discuss just a few. And I'm sure that others out there have some examples that they can share.

First of all, use your Web site. You can post jobs that you know about, recruitment announcements, job postings for specific jobs. Put an Interest Form out on your Web site so that if somebody visits your Web site and they see a hot job or a posted job out there that they're qualified for, they can provide you with an Interest Form.

That Interest Form is simply a form that they can fill out online and when they submit it it comes directly to you. And it provides you an opportunity to glance over their background information so that you can determine whether or not they may be qualified for that job.

You can use the Referral CD from Maximus to send mailings to Ticket Holders within a specific city or zip code for jobs that are available and you're trying to fill. Perhaps, you know, they're teetering on whether or not they want to try to go back to work, and seeing that there's a job they're qualified for might be just what they need in order to get them to contact you.

So and you can also contact other organizations who assist people with disabilities and see if they can post jobs on their bulletin board locally. And we've had some success with that. Even the bulletin board at the local Veteran's hospital, we post job openings there. And sometimes, you know, we'll get people calling us from those.

So think outside the box and use every source you can to get the word out when you have jobs that you're trying to fill but you don't have candidates for.

If your organization is not already a member of the National Employment Network Association you really need to consider becoming a member. NENA is a wonderful source that promotes training and networking opportunities for the Ticket Service Providers. And by reaching out and sharing job information with other ENs you may be able to find qualified applicants quickly, much quicker than you can, you know, by posting a job somewhere.

So whether you work out a split payment agreement with another EN, or you're just happy to share and have another job filled for the contractor you're working with, it's of benefit. But NENA provides a wonderful networking opportunity and support mechanism for ENs. So I strongly encourage you to add that to your toolbox, you know, to find qualified candidates.

You can use blogs, groups, emails, resource Web sites, to share and obtain job information. It's a - the blogs and the groups, like we setup a Yahoo Group, and it's a great way to partner with Ticket Providers who also have a lot of jobs that they're unable to fill.

So people can go out there and say, "You know I've got all these jobs and here's a list of what they are and where they are," and then someone else, you know, can join in that group and say, "Yes, you know I've got somebody I think's qualified for this one, but I've got 15 jobs in Abilene and I can't fill those." So it's a great way to share and it's something that everybody can do right now.

There are several groups that are currently working on better ways for Ticket Providers to access open jobs with federal contractors. And I think we can expect to see a more - I guess a larger scale, more coordinated effort and opportunities for sharing in the near future.

Because the ideas and opportunities for sharing are endless, but because Section 503 is so new I think a lot of those things are still being implemented. So in the meantime use the tools that are available, such as the blogs, the groups, the emails, NENA, Web site -- all of that -- to find jobs and share jobs.

Partnering with other service providers is essential when you have openings you can't fill. And that's the one thing, you know, that everybody should remember. In addition to the formal or informal job sharing with employment networks, there's opportunities for participating in Partnership Plus and with state VR offices and working with One-Stop on the career - the Career One-Stops in the American Job Centers.

And I believe (Kevin Nickerson)'s going to be providing a session on partnering with One-Stops in the near future. And that's going to be a really, really good session, so plan on attending that one. Okay let's move on to Slide 14.

Early in the presentation I mentioned two critical areas while working with federal contractors, those being filling enough positions for the federal contractor to see the value of working with your organization; and secondly, screening applicants to ensure only well-qualified job-ready individuals are submitted for consideration.

The screening process is probably the most time consuming -- I know it is for me. But you can reduce the time for prescreening by planning processes and using tools that will help you.

For example if you have an Interest Form, like I mentioned earlier it's available to everyone and they can fill it out from your Web site so that you can quickly identify their areas of interest, their skillset, their past work history and their education.

For those Ticket Holders who send you an Interest Form and you assign, you can provide them information and training about Section 503. That training should include at a minimum an explanation of Section 503 and its purpose; information on voluntary disclosure versus nondisclosure so that the Ticket Holder can make an informed decision.

And we always provide a copy of the standard Section 503 Disclosure Form that federal contractors use because it can be kind of daunting when someone's filling out an application and that form pops up. You know, and if they're expecting to see it and they know what their options are and how to answer it, it will make them more confident as they're filling out job applications with federal contractors. So you'll want to include that as part of your training.

And as with all Ticket Holders, training should include assistance with basic interview preparation, pre-employment discussion, to improve the importance of the soft skills, things that we sometimes, you know, take for granted like dressing appropriately for an interview and for work and being responsible by showing up on time and not calling in sick unless you really, really are sick, practicing good manners, being dedicated to learning a job, those types of things, you know, doing the job as best they possibly can.

Now for those beneficiaries who submit Interest Forms and they're not good candidates for the job that they were responding to, you can always keep their Interest Forms on file and contact them if something does come up that they're interested in.

Otherwise, what we normally do if we're not in a position to take the ticket is that we just put them on the wait list for, you know, when we have opportunities available and then we can re-contact them and see if they're interested in that point. So that might be a helpful tip and another way that you can find qualified candidates quickly.

Okay moving on real quickly to Slide 15. I provided some resources that can be used by both Ticket Providers and Ticket Holders to determine skills abilities and interest, but due to time constraints I'm not going to go into great detail. But I encourage you to explore those sites.

And Slide 16, this is a link to a really free, fun, cool tool I recently had some of our Ticket Holders test and so far everyone has given it a thumbs up, and it has really been a time-saver for me. It allows - well it's - first of all, it's a free site. So if you use it please inform your Ticket Holders that you're not recommending that they make any purchases. Free sites have a lot of popups so they just need to disregard the popups and enjoy the free tool.

But this tool allows individuals to select a question, answer it, then get feedback on ways to improve their response. So anybody can try it, and it's free, so I encourage you to check that one out.

And then Slide 17 I'm going to cut kind of short too, because of our time constraints. But you need to establish a solid job screening process. Use available tools and resources. Ask questions to find hidden issues that could disqualify a Ticket Holder for a specific position.

For instance, if you know that a security background check or a criminal background check is going to be required for a certain position you need to ask the right questions to try to find out if there's anything early-on that would disqualify that candidate from, you know, from being a good fit for that job. You don't want to send a qualified candidate only to determine that, you know, they were disqualified, you know, because they couldn't pass the background check.

If people have reference letters from employers that's - that always can give you a good indication of a person's strengths or weaknesses based on what the letter says. Use the low-cost or free tools to confirm a person's skillset -- and we talked about some of those earlier, the ONET type software.

And again I'm going to stress, "Refer only well-qualified job rated candidates to employers." Slide 18 please.

Any time you have a lot of irons in the fire it's important to create a process for tracking because it's the best way you're going to be able to determine the success of what you're doing and see if you're accomplishing what you intended to accomplish.

So my suggestion is for right now just a simple spreadsheet for each employer so you can maintain an ongoing list to track, you know who sent you jobs; the Ticket Holders that you submitted or who submitted applications; the date and the outcome of each application submitted; the date hired if your referral is hired.

And if they're interviewed but not hired, this is a good opportunity being as you have this relationship with the employer to maybe get some feedback on the interview process and what - if there was something that they did or didn't do that they could have done differently, that you know, would have caused the outcome to be different, you know, where maybe they would have gotten the job if they had said or done something different. So that's always something you can do with 503 when working with employers.

And Slide 19. I'm going to finish up, I just want to add that, you know, we all have a great opportunity to participate in recruitment and job placement for federal contractors. It's really exciting, but none of us can do it alone, none of us have the capacity to fill every open position, and so we all need to work together to develop the tools and best practices and processes and figure out ways to coordinate our effort so that we can do a better job for our Ticket Holders, and the federal contractors that will be employing them.

So and Slide 20 is a list of additional resources that are available at the Section 503 site at Your Ticket to Work.

And with that, now that I really ran through those last few slides I think we're ready for any additional questions that there may be.

Operator: And Ladies and Gentlemen as a reminder, to register for a phone question press the 1 followed by the 4. Okay, and there are no phone questions at this time.

We do have one phone question, it's from the line of (Ann Austin). Please proceed with your question.

(Ann Austin): Hi Pam, when you get a Ticket....

Pam Walker: Hi (Ann).

(Ann Austin): How are you?

Pam Walker: Great.

(Ann Austin): When you get a Ticket Holder that you - that comes to you and they're interested in a specific job but you don't think they're totally qualified, how do you respond back to them?

Pam Walker: Well sometimes - if they're contacting you by phone you can usually dig and ask, you know, questions to confirm if they either are or are not qualified. And if you get an Interest Form through the Web site there's a lot of information there. So sometimes you can, you know, look at that and know right off the bat that they either are or aren't.

But in any event, we try to contact everyone that submits an Interest Form or contacts us about a job so that we can do some initial prescreening. We don't accept every ticket from every person. Sometimes even if they're qualified there may be, you know, something that keeps us from assigning their ticket.

Maybe for instance, if they don't have Internet service, because we're a national provider, it's very, very difficult for us to work with someone who doesn't have Internet service or access to Internet service, for instance if they live in a rural area.

So once we review everything we determine whether or not we're going to take their ticket. If we take their ticket, obviously we go through the process. If we choose not to take their ticket then we still keep their information on file for at least 12 months.

Because as we have job opportunities coming in from federal contractors we can do a search for keywords on the Interest Forms or resumes that we have on file. And if something comes up and we see that they are qualified we can always call them back and touch base.

So we kind of put them in that holding pattern and try to check back with them periodically to see if they're still interested. And you know, sometimes we find that their situation has changed, and you know, then it's a good time for them to assign their ticket because now they either have, you know, reliable transportation or they moved to an area where there's jobs, or you know.

So it does take a lot of prescreening by phone, you know, and by looking at their resume and documents before we decide what we're going to do with them.

(Ann Austin): Thank you (unintelligible)...

Pam Walker: Did that answer...

(Ann Austin): ...for a great training today.

(Sally): Yes.

Pam Walker: Okay, thank you.

Operator: And there are no further phone questions at this time.

Pam Walker: Okay. (Sally), anything in Chat?

(Sally): No, I don't think there is.

Pam Walker: Okay.

Sabra Gardner: Pam, this is Sabra, and I just want to thank you and tell you how much we sincerely appreciate what you have provided to everyone today. An excellent, excellent discussion. And thank you to everyone who shared in the peer to peer conversation today -- very, very good.

I do want to confirm with everyone here that the 124 nonprofit EN agencies that SSA referred to the OFCCP for listing on their Disability and Veteran Community Resource Directory are up and posted. There were some IT issues that they had to rectify. So everyone that we wanted to be there is there.

If you are interested in taking a look at that you can visit the Web site, dol.gov/ofccp, and then just click on the - find Section 503 and VEVRAA Contractor Resources and you get a whole list of things that you can do and pull up, one of which is the Disability and Veteran Community Resource List.

We are - also I wanted to just point out to mark your calendars for June 4 at 3:00 pm, we're looking forward to next month's Community in Practice, which Pam stole my thunder a little bit by announcing early, but she is absolutely correct; (Kevin Nickerson) is going to be on with us and he's going to help to revisit the American Job Center Job Listings, Job Banks, for federal contractor postings and job matchings, talking about how you can partner together.

So we certainly hope to see you all then. We're heading into summer and sometimes things become a little more difficult to make. But we certainly hope you find value in these forums and we look forward to hearing from you when we hear from (Kevin Nickerson).

And Pam, thank you again so much.

Pam Walker: Well thank you so much for the opportunity.

Sabra Gardner: Have a great day everyone.

Woman: Thank you.

Operator: Ladies and Gentlemen that does conclude our webinar. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your line.

END