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Destination JOBS

A Summary of the

**Hennepin County, Minnesota
Reverse Commute
Employment Program**

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16. Abstract <p>Destination Jobs is a successful collaboration of business, community and government connecting urban workers with suburban employers. It is a four year old reverse commute employment program operating in Hennepin County, Minnesota, between innercity Minneapolis and its southwestern suburbs. Destination Jobs focuses on a simple idea: connect people who need jobs with employers who need workers. The overall intent of the program was not only to create jobs, but also to address key issues affecting cities today. This user-friendly Practitioner's Guide details all aspects of establishing a reverse commute employment project. It is a valuable resource for anyone starting or working to improve a reverse commute employment program. The guide describes the roles of each collaborative partner, highlights and explains how to implement a Job Fair -- the central event that gave this project a focus, a "how to", a place to begin, and the vehicle that coordinated the overall effort. The guide describes potential pitfalls and how to avoid them. It includes sample forms, flyers, letters and other useful documents. The contents and ideas of this manual will be of particular interest to employers, government agencies, chambers of commerce, training and employment agencies as well as transit agencies. The <i>Destination Jobs Videotape</i> is also available. It provides a comprehensive overview of the entire project in live action. The video conveys the essence of this successful project for audiences of individuals and small or large groups.</p>			
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Table of Contents

Overview	1
The Job Fair	13
Section 1: The Role of Business	31
Section 2: The Role of Government	45
Section 3: The Role of the Chamber of Commerce	52
Section 4: The Role of Training and Employment Agencies and Community Service Agencies	57
Section 5: The Role of Transit	72
Critical Success Factors	81
Appendix and Letters	



Overview

Destination Jobs

"In the past decade in one major metropolitan area, 98 percent of all job growth was in the suburbs, 75 percent of it in outer-ring suburbs."

"Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for people who live in the central city of this same metropolitan area exceeded 15 percent compared with an overall rate of about 4 percent."

Peter Leyden — Minneapolis Star Tribune

What's Wrong With This Picture?

Clearly, the highest job demand is occurring in areas where the people who need those jobs are not.

The solution to this problem is not difficult — get the unemployed people to the jobs.

But it isn't that easy. At least historically it hasn't been that easy. Vans, ride systems, buying old cars for people. These and a variety of other attempts have met with limited success. Government, employment agencies, employers — they have all tried to deal with this problem in one way or another.

What is needed is a system, and a commitment to make it happen.

Reverse Commuting

“What is needed is a ‘reverse commute’: buses and vans that run counter to rush hour flow — on a regular basis.”

“It’s an exciting effort to bridge a growing gap between the metropolitan area’s have’s and have nots.”

“Workers from the city may worry about fitting into a suburban environment and that they be accepted. They may be struggling with self esteem. But potential employers may worry about applicants different backgrounds, previous difficulties in holding jobs, and such matters.”

Leonard Inskip — Minneapolis Star Tribune

Reverse Commuting

Obviously the idea is a good one.

Bus the people to the jobs.

But it isn’t just a matter of transportation. There are issues of funding, a critical mass of people, geography, cooperation between transit authorities, government support, differences in life style and work style and self esteem as well as differences in culture and language.

In short, to make it happen, takes a huge collaborative effort to coordinate a wide number of social, economic and personal factors.

The purpose of this manual is to:

- Outline the history and background of one successful model.
- Explain what is being done to deal with it.
- Provide information — a “how-to” kit, tools and tips for people who are interested in getting involved in working in this area.

Getting Started

Before we launch into the details of this manual, a little explanation is necessary.

What we are talking about here, a large and diverse community program, is quite complex, and has a large number of factors that need to be covered.

Also, the target audience — i.e., you the readers — are diverse. You come from a wide variety of communities and backgrounds. Your interests vary depending on your needs and your experiences.

So our primary questions in putting this material together were:

- How do we do it?
- What's the best way to meet all the needs of our potential audience?

Trying to second guess all our readers, we decided, was probably not the best way to go. So we decided to approach it by doing two basic things:

- Be true to our own experience, and
- Try to avoid giving too little or too much information.

We can only describe what happened in our own experience. As a result, this manual combines a chronological review with specific accounts of the responsibilities of the various stakeholders.

Also, we want this manual to be specific enough to provide you some “meat” — detail that will be specific enough to help you get started. But at the same time, we don't want to project an “add water and stir” attitude, i.e., the idea that what worked for us will work exactly the same for your community. Communities are different; therefore one community's approach cannot be duplicated exactly in another community.

Hopefully, we have struck a balance that will be useful to you.

So, we begin on the next two pages by addressing *who* and *how*: “Who should read this manual?” and “How to use this manual.” After that, we proceed to the background and scope of the project, and from there into the details of our experience.

Who Should Read This Manual — And Why?

In general, this manual is addressed to anyone who has an interest in the "Reverse Commute" program. In particular, the contents and ideas are addressed to the following.

EMPLOYERS

Interested in finding qualified people to meet their growing employment needs, particularly entry-level jobs. A number of businesses which have decided to locate or relocate in the outer-ring suburbs have run into difficulty getting people from their communities to fill the jobs. In general, it does not initially occur to them to look to the inner city for resources.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Interested City, County and State agencies who want to partner in an effort to increase employment, reduce dependence on welfare and, in general, create a healthier personal, business and socio-economic climate.

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

Interested in building the economic strength of their business communities. This category also includes business associations or any other organizations interested in promoting the business climate of the community.

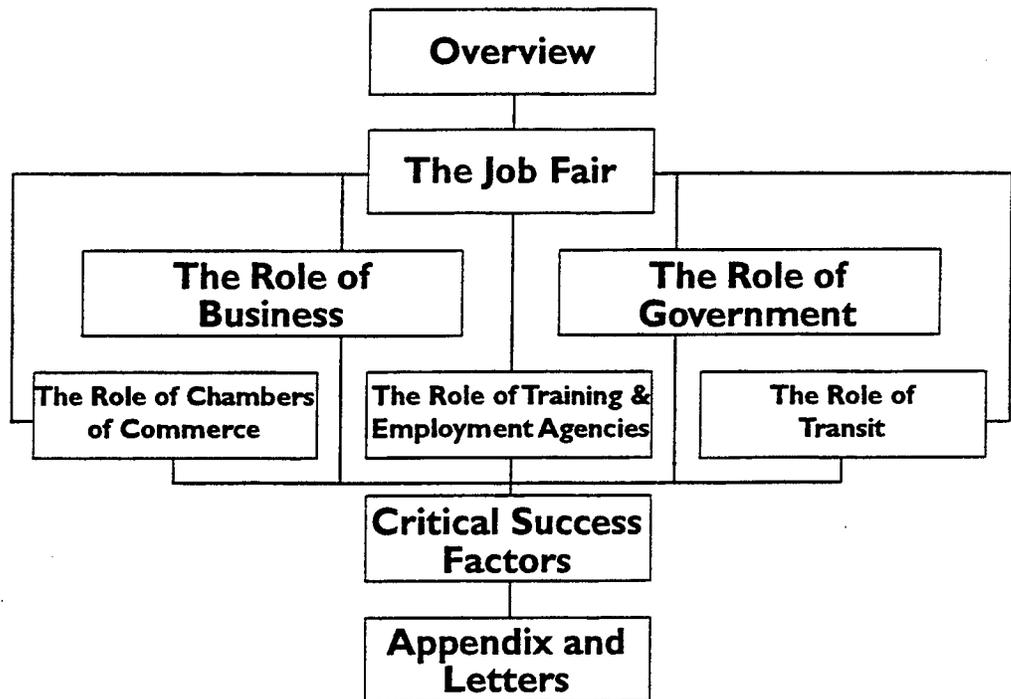
TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Interested in preparing people to be able to qualify for specific jobs, and get to job sites. Traditionally, these agencies and organizations tend to see their charter as being primarily directed at the chronically underemployed and welfare recipients in their immediate environment; to assist people into the mainstream of the surrounding community.

TRANSIT AUTHORITIES

Interested in establishing new routes to efficiently and profitably get the people who need jobs to those jobs. Some, transit agencies see their charter — to serve the public's needs — in terms of their immediate community or in terms of their already established routes. Others truly see their charter to serve their own and other communities around them. Overall, however, it is essential for these agencies to see their responsibility as extending to a larger community.

How To Use This Manual



Begin by completing this **Overview** and then move on to the section that covers the primary vehicle for coordinating the overall effort, **The Job Fair**. Then, depending on your particular position and interest, you may go to any one (or more) of the next sections, covering the roles of Business, Government, Transit, Employment Agencies and Chambers of Commerce.

In these sections you will find valuable information, tools and hints on how to support the program.

Finally, look over the **Critical Success Factors** section to see which applies to you or may be useful to you. Then move on to the **Conclusion**.

In all, the manual is laid out to allow you to access the information you need.

For a more detailed summary of each of the sections, see the "Descriptions" page that follows.

Descriptions

OVERVIEW

The section you are currently reading. The rest of this section will overview the projects' history and principal stakeholders.

THE JOB FAIR

The central event that gave the project a focus and a place to begin. This section summarizes the details and "how to's" of The Job Fair itself.

SECTION 1

The Role of Business. Its job in helping make the project work; hints and ideas for garnering internal support; the need for flexibility and commitment; the benefits to the organization.

SECTION 2

The Role of Government. Its role as a source of support -- both financially and politically; factors to be considered; resources that can be accessed.

SECTION 3

The Chambers of Commerce. Their role as the "central focus" in such a project; the role they can play in the ongoing support of the venture.

SECTION 4

The Role of Training and Employment and Community Service Agencies. The role of these agencies in selecting and preparing potential employees for jobs; ideas regarding issues such as qualifications, interviewing, self esteem and community awareness.

SECTION 5

The Role of Transit. Its role in coordinating the actual transportation; the factors that need to be addressed; possible avenues for collaboration with other organizations and agencies.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The key factors that need to be present to insure success.

APPENDIX AND LETTERS

Support material and resources regarding the program.

History and Background

Like many movements, the Reverse Commute program had a grass roots beginning. The chronology of this beginning is basically as follows.

In 1987, the legislature looked at the idea of a reverse commute program. Representative Peter McLaughlin (current Chair of the Hennepin County Board) supported the project, but it was an uphill battle. Then in 1990, the city of Minneapolis (Hennepin County) gave some money to Loring Nicollet-Bethlehem Community Centers, Inc., a nonprofit educational and social services agency, to run a van to the suburbs.

Then, in June of 1990, Preferred Products Inc., a division a Super Value Inc., faced a problem of finding workers to fill available jobs. PPI is located in Chaska, Minnesota, an outer ring suburb of the metropolitan Twin Cities area. After spreading the word and advertising — and looking for applicants “outward,” i.e., in nearby rural areas — they were still short of their goal.

Eventually, Loring-Nicollet connected up with PPI and a solid link was established. Also, about that time, more funds were being made available for the project, and as a result more monies were put into promoting the project.

At first it seemed like a marriage made in heaven — jobs for workers and workers for jobs. Then the reality of the situation began to set in.

- The jobs were twenty miles away from the workers, most of whom had no transportation.
- There were differences in both cultural and work ethic of the workers and employers.
- There were logistical issues such as unions and skill levels.

Working through these problems, PPI set up a successful solution by using vans to pick up and drop off workers. Jointly, PPI and Loring-Nicollet began the work of overcoming differences by matching people to jobs and helping to foster mutual understanding.

About that time, other companies in similar situations were trying similar methods to get workers to the jobs. One company used cabs. One company even bought an old junker car for several workers.

Clearly the concept had merit. But since the needs in this area were not limited to just a few companies, a more widespread and permanent solution was needed.

History and Background

This need, then, was the genesis for what ultimately became a program for a much wider number of employers and workers — The Reverse Commute Program, known as “Destination Jobs.”

By this time the word had spread, and not only employers but also chambers of commerce, county and city governments, employment assistance organizations and transit companies were trying to find out what it would take to make this whole process work on a larger scale.

At this point, in the fall of 1992, a subcommittee of the Eden Prairie, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee was formed. This group eventually broke off from the main committee and became known as the Reverse Commute Committee; it consisted of representatives of business, transit companies, government, training and employment agencies and other interested individuals,

They decided to go out on a limb and sponsor a Job Fair to promote the Reverse Commute concept. The stated purpose of the Job Fair was to provide a forum for business and potential employees to get together and make a match — all the while being supported by the transit and government organizations that would make the link up actually happen.

The stage from its groundswell beginnings to the first Job Fair, then, marks the first and very successful stage of the Reverse Commute program.

A final added piece — actually a coincidence — also occurred at this time. The Mall of America opened and started bus service between the Mall and surrounding locations in the south and west suburban areas including, Eden Prairie. The service was another link in an evolving network of transit lines. The potential was building.

The next stage, continuing the program, is where we are now. In the next section — The Job Fair — we will introduce the primary ways you may be able to begin such a program in your community.

In summary the basic steps in this history were:

- Businesses began to locate outward — toward the outer-ring suburbs — creating a need for employees.
- Groundswell interest in linking available jobs and unemployed people.
- Initial attempts at transporting the people to the jobs.

History and Background

- Success on a small scale or in certain pockets.
- The county produced funds to support this interest.
- The Job Fair was established.
- Interest and connections grew and the project began to “roll.”

The program came together as a result of a lot of ideas, a lot of work, a lot of setbacks and a little luck.

As businessman Dick Feerick, one of the original promoters of the program put it: “We enjoyed it — most of the time.”

In all, Feerick concludes, the program was a product of “collaboration, commitment and tough love.”

“We were able,” he continues, “to convince inner city residents and the Neighborhood Employment Networks that jobs were really there — and that people cared. We convinced businesses that there were good employees available in the inner city willing to make the necessary commitments.”

Finally, it is worth mentioning here that this effort doesn't have to be viewed as a conflict with the core cities' efforts to attract businesses to locate plants or facilities in the inner city. The reality in our experience is that suburban jobs exist now, and many inner-city residents need a job now. The longer-term redevelopment issues should continue, and in fact will be enhanced if inner-city residents have achieved higher levels of improved work skills and income.

The Scope and the Hope of the Program

The overall intent of the program is more than just creating employment. At its highest level, the program is designed to address the key issues affecting cities today. The facts are these:

- American cities today are struggling with the problems of poverty, urban blight, high unemployment and the consequences of crime and drugs.
- There now exists a large underclass with a deep sense of frustration and even rage at the inequalities in our system.
- Governments at all levels are trying to address these issues primarily by allocating resources to deal with employment, crime and welfare.
- These efforts are not addressing the problem successfully.

No program can solve all of these problems. But there does seem to be some consensus that one of the keys to unlocking this door of despair is meaningful work — specifically, work that provides:

- Adequate Income
- Health and Welfare Benefits
- Skills and Abilities
- Dignity and Self Respect

Obviously, as we've said, jobs alone will not solve the problem. But as a first step, meaningful employment can begin to chip away at the problem and hopefully create greater opportunity for individuals and families to live in a comfortable and dignified manner.

Development of a work ethic — and awareness that there are alternatives to drugs and crime — is an essential message to present, but it must be backed with substantive and concrete methods to make it a reality.

At its essence, then, the Reverse Commute Program is one of jobs, commitment and the recognition of the aspirations and basic self-worth of inner-city residents. These terms may seem abstract and too idealistic, but nothing less than a commitment to so called "lofty" ideals is likely to result in success, given the efforts that have to be made and the obstacles that have to be overcome.

Benefits to Stakeholders

Finally, the specific benefits to the stakeholders in this program are:

EMPLOYERS

- Full employment in their plants and businesses
- Diversity — employing a wider spectrum of people
- Continued growth and contribution to the community

CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

- Supports the Chambers' mission of business and community growth
- Tangible way for Chamber to benefit its membership
- Sponsorship provides publicity and recognition to Chamber

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

- Lower unemployment and dependence on welfare
- More people paying taxes and supporting the community
- Less poverty; lower crime rates

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

- More job openings and placements
- Quality jobs as measured by pay, benefits and growth opportunities
- Paychecks which stimulate inner-city communities

TRANSIT AUTHORITIES

- Added routes and therefore added revenues
- Equipment utilization efficiencies — the ability to create a larger network of operations
- Increased economic vitality and contribution to the community

Collaboration — The Key Ingredient

In a perfect world this program would not have to exist. People, agencies and government would see the need and meet it.

In a real world — even though the need is clear and the solution seemingly obvious — it takes effort. Specifically it takes a concerted effort of communication and cooperation to make it happen. Without this concerted effort, such programs tend to break apart and collapse.

Everybody who worked on this project and everybody currently working on it emphasize over and over the central theme:

***This effort cannot succeed
without a tremendous amount of
commitment and collaboration.***

This point cannot be overstressed.

The complexity of the project and the number of obstacles that need to be continually addressed and overcome, make this the kind of effort that cannot happen unless people really *want* it to happen.

But it is important to remember that the greater the effort and need for cooperation, the greater the rewards when it succeeds.

So, in that vein — the theme of collaboration — we move to the central effort that taxed our collaborative efforts to the maximum — ***The Job Fair.***



The Job Fair

Getting Started

As we have seen, the beginnings of a Reverse Commute program will almost surely be a “coming together” of a variety of people, organizations and agencies to accomplish a common goal.

Each individual will represent his or her interest group or agenda. The challenge is to bring all the different interests together with a common focus.

No single organization or agency can pull off, all by itself, a project of this scope.

We also need to remember that in the Twin Cities, the program came about initially as a grass roots groundswell movement to solve a simple need. In other words, before it became “official” in any sense, it was actually being done on a small scale.

The organization and cooperation that came into being basically grew up to support an already existing idea in practice. The team recognized the need to provide greater resources, and expand the effort to a larger scope.

All of which begs the questions:

- To what extent is your community ready to support such a program?
- Are the “Pieces” in place — or at least potentially in place — to allow such a program even to begin?

If you have a basic understanding of the needs and challenges, you will develop a focus and consequently a greater commitment to the program.

We cannot say for sure what will or will not work in other communities. Certainly, however, some of the ideas presented here will be helpful. To begin, we can help you ask some of what we think are the key questions in order to determine your readiness.

Moving Ahead

Before moving ahead, you need to ask yourself:

➤ Are We Ready?

Is there a level of readiness in our community to begin such a program?
Specifically:

- Is there a recognized need?
- Are there suburban employers looking for employees?
- Is there an inner-city population of potential employees ready and willing to commute?
- Are there interested people willing to commit time?
- Are there community and governmental agencies which recognize this need and are willing to tackle it?
- Do the chambers of commerce and transit agencies see a need — and are they willing to tackle it?
- Are the players in place?
- Are all these interested parties in a position to help?
- Is the timing right?
- Are there already fledgling activities underway?
- Will this support be able to build on any already existing activities?
- Are there currently any grassroots efforts in place to help workers commute to the suburbs?

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, you have established an adequate base to begin.

The key is to get four or five people that can work together and want to get things done.

Moving Ahead

Now, at this point, the paths could diverge. In other words, there are probably many ways to get a program up and running.

But since we will be trying to pull together a number of different people and organizations, one thing is for sure: You will need large measures of Cooperation and Collaboration.

What we found worked best in creating and enabling this cooperation and collaboration was a central force — a central event — the Job Fair. The bulk of this section concerns itself with the details and factors to consider in setting up a Job Fair.

Before we launch into those details, however, we want to address a key issue — actually a “tool” — namely, your *mission statement*.

Before doing anything, drafting such a statement is a good idea because it gives you and others a shorthand way of communicating who you are and what you are all about. Thus, the following two pages address the mission statement, and then we will move on to the Job Fair itself.

Drafting A Mission Statement and Creating a “Core”

Mission statements run hot and cold. Some are useful tools that help define and communicate both purpose and intent.

Others sound like the preamble to the constitution, and express only idealistic pie-in-the-sky sentiments.

Framing a mission statement should not be a lengthy activity — yet when done well, it is an essential activity for the following reasons:

- It helps an organization or committee develop and agree on a **common focus**.
- It helps you decide what is important; helps you define your **priorities**.
- It helps you identify your **means and methods**.
- It provides you with a statement to communicate your **intent** to others.

The key to drafting a good mission statement is:

- Keep it clear.
- Keep it simple.

The Mission Statement for the Twin Cities Project is:

The primary goal of “Destination Jobs” Job Fair is to facilitate placement of unemployed and underemployed individuals — primarily from inner-city neighborhoods — into quality jobs in the Southwest Metro communities of Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska and Edina. The program is designed to help bridge the gap between Southwest Metro communities, an area with one of the fastest rates of job creation in the region, and the inner-city population, which has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the Twin Cities.

Drafting A Mission Statement

Above all, when drafting such a statement always keep in mind:

- What it's going to be like to be on the "receiving end" of this statement?
- What does it *sound* like?
- Not only does it *say* what you want , but does it give the *feel* that you want.

A **core** is an expression or a symbol that communicates in a few seconds the essence of what and who you are.

Cores are usually phrases, slogans or symbols.

Avis' "We Try Harder" is a core statement. The "poster child" is a core that takes the form of a picture. One large insurance company uses the symbol (or logo) of a red umbrella as its core.

In the Appendix we have provided a little more information about mission statements and cores, as well as some detail on how to create them.

For now, however, we want to move on to the focus of this section — ***The Job Fair.***

The Job Fair — How It Came About

In the fall of 1992, a group which came to be known as the "Reverse Commute" committee broke off from the Eden Prairie Chamber's transportation committee. This group quickly grew from a small core of individuals involved in grassroots activities to a large group representing businesses, government, transit agencies, local Chambers of Commerce, and public and private jobs and training agencies.

The goal of the committee quickly evolved from one of expanding the understanding and practicality of the reverse commute concept to promotion or advocacy of the idea. Late in 1992, an idea surfaced to sponsor a Job Fair linked to reverse commuting as a way to build the critical mass necessary to establish public transit routes and overall support for the concept.

The committee approached the Hennepin County Board with the idea, and ultimately received funding to implement a Job Fair. The funding was designed to do two things: 1) pay for a Project Coordinator to take ultimate responsibility for organizing the project, i.e., liaison to involved businesses and communities, securing a location, handling logistics of the event, booths; exhibitor materials, correspondence, public relations, transportation, and overall budget; and 2) defray the actual costs of the event.

Once the financing was in place and a Project Coordinator hired, the project got underway. The coordinator held separate meetings with each of the stakeholders (businesses, Chambers, government, training agencies, transit agencies) to solicit input regarding their needs and the level of commitment including resources such as time, manpower, financial support that could be brought to bear on the project. It became apparent that each stakeholder had a strong commitment to fulfill his or her own specific needs.

This fact turned out to be both a strength and a weakness of the project: the strength being the fact that this commitment motivated the stakeholders to get involved; the weakness being that this motivation to fulfill self interest created the potential for conflict between stakeholders.

Some of these conflicts include:

- Businesses competing for the same workers
- Chambers promoting their own members and communities rather than joint efforts
- Community governments with conflicting economic development agendas
- Transit agency territories or route exclusivity.

The Job Fair — How It Came About

So the initial design of the Job Fair was the result of a long string of compromises between participants. The goal was to design an event in which the stakeholders could get some or all of what they needed without explicitly offending other participants.

Planning meetings were known to become exciting at times when these conflicts would arise. The key to holding the meetings and participants together was to keep bringing the focus back to a macro level — that being everyone will be better off if we're successful in facilitating the placement of the inner-city unemployed in available suburban jobs. The undying support of this goal by key people in the planning process is ultimately what made the project work.

The Job Fair that evolved from this planning effort reflected the element of compromise. In its final form the Job Fair was a combination of a focused hiring Job Fair and publicity event. Each of the annual Job Fairs has begun with a kick-off event designed to be informative for participating businesses and jobs and training agencies, as well as the general public and media. Community leaders from business or government serve as featured speakers. This program has helped to draw attention to the event and has drawn considerable attention by the media.

The Job Fair itself relies on three key elements. Employers with job openings, focused job seekers, and a positive environment for the two groups to meet. An area shopping mall offered their facilities for free and it provided a central location with adequate space for the event. The employers are provided a booth which they can outfit as they see fit. Separate interviewing booths are set up in the mall's community room providing a private place for employers to do initial screening interviews. Special booths for jobs and training agency counselors and transit agency representatives are provided to facilitate support for job seekers or employers.

A more complete picture of the details of the Job Fair can be gleaned from the Job Fair section of the Appendix.

For our purposes here, what follows is an overview of the key activities as well as a summary of the stakeholder's involvement in the Job Fair. It is not intended to be a recipe, but rather a template -- a list of possible or potential elements you may want to attend to in setting up your own program.

The Job Fair — How It Came About

Essentially the Job Fair can be broken down along the following lines:

- Employer Participants
- Job Seekers
- Publicity/Media Relations
- Budget
- Event Programs
- Event Logistics
- Post Job Fair Follow-up

Key Activities

EMPLOYER PARTICIPANTS

We have recruited employers by community. A prospecting letter was created and is typically sent through an influential business leader within each participating community. Each Chamber of Commerce also distributes our program fact sheet and reservation form via their monthly newsletter. Our experience has taught us that community teams need to be formed to do follow-up via phone or in person visits to sell the program. This task is critically important because jobs or job openings are what drive the whole process. So securing the participation of employers as early as possible is essential.

Once employers agree to participate, they are provided with detailed information about the event and their role. The key is obtaining specific information on job openings. This is accomplished using a job order form. As these job order forms are completed, they are forwarded to the jobs and training agencies to aid them in identifying candidates for the openings.

JOB SEEKERS

The success of the Job Fair depends heavily on the support and involvement of inner city jobs and training agencies. By providing these agencies with detailed job information, skill requirements, pay, benefits, hours of work, etc., counselors can identify potential candidates to send to the Job Fair.

To increase interest, advertising, information sessions, flyers and posters are used in inner city neighborhoods to draw attention to the Job Fair in particular and suburban jobs generally. A key to the success of the Job Fair has been the funding of free bus transportation from the inner city to the Job Fair.

PUBLICITY/MEDIA RELATIONS

Each year a media kit is prepared and distributed to radio, television and the press. This kit provides a public service announcement and detailed information on the Job Fair. Targeted advertising is done in neighborhood newspapers where job seekers live and in the major daily newspaper as well.

Key Activities

BUDGET

Funding for the annual Job Fair has averaged \$30,000 each year. The funds come from two sources: employer participant fees and the County Department of Training and Employment Assistance. Initially the county provided a larger percentage of the funds, however participant fees were increased to provide approximately half of the total required. Approximately one-third of the budget goes to compensate the Project Coordinator with the remaining two-thirds covering all other expenses associated with the Job Fair.

EVENT PROGRAM

The annual Job Fair begins with a kick-off program. The purpose of this event is threefold. First, it is designed to inform and update participating employer representatives and other participating stakeholders regarding issues relevant to the event and the project in a general sense. Second, it provides a forum for key stakeholders to lend support to or gain recognition regarding their involvement with Destination Jobs. Third, it serves as a media or promotional event which attracts attention and adds credibility to the project throughout the community. Speakers typically include individuals such as mayors, county commissioners, business leaders and representatives from training, transit and Chambers of Commerce.

EVENT LOGISTICS

On the day of the event, certain measures were taken to create a high profile for the program.

- *Setting* The Job Fair was held at a major shopping mall in one of the targeted suburbs.
- *Breakfast* Breakfast was provided for all; the media was invited.
- *Keynote* The CEO of an area business kicked off the day and spoke to the value of the program.
- *Dignitaries* In attendance were mayors, representatives, county commissioners, city council members and other political officials.

Key Activities

The coordinator hired a trade show company to set up booths for the on-site interviews.

Also, the restaurants in the mall agreed to provide discounted lunches to the job fair participants.

Throughout the day there were volunteer workers and members of the various chambers of commerce and businesses present to assist where ever possible in orienting and helping people. Copy machines were provided to copy resumes or application forms.

Exhibitors received a packet with a program agenda, exhibitor listing, Jobs and Training agency listing, interview sign-up sheet, program evaluation form, and lunch coupons.

Each participant was provided with a set of materials that included a floor plan, coupons, and a list of employers.

POST JOB FAIR

Each year, one of the most confounding tasks subsequent to the event has been the tracking of who gets hired and by whom. Tracking hires via employers has proven to be impossible. Because of the open-ended nature of the hiring process, and wide variability of record keeping practices of the 45 or more companies, tracking results are less than reliable. Our best results have come by way of the job and training agencies who typically keep detailed records of placements as a standard agency performance criteria. This information, supplemented with the self-report information from employers, gives us our best estimate.

Our experience has been that the Job Fair attracts about 400 job seekers each year, with over 100 attendees being hired within six months of the event.

In all, the job fair is a high-profile "event" in the full sense of the word. It provides the exposure and the impetus to give the program a jump start.

What we have provided here is certainly not a complete list of all the details, but rather a summary of the basic flow and elements in the organization and implementation of the job fair.

Key Activities

The “basics” include: publicity, the involvement of business, government, employment agencies, transit and chambers of commerce, logistics and coordination.

The following sections will lay out in a little more detail the specific roles or issues for the key stakeholders involved at the Job Fair, Employers, Government, Training and Employment Agencies and Transit Agencies.

Employers

There can be no Job Fair without jobs. But in order to ensure that you get the right people for the right jobs and also that there will be a fit, there are certain key things that have to be done.

1. **Immediately Available Jobs.** Be sure that the jobs that you are offering are either immediately available or that there is a firm date in the near future that the job will be available. Publish the specifics — i.e., when the job will be available, hours and work environment.
2. **Clear Job Qualifications.** Be sure that the jobs are clearly defined as to their duties, requirements, salary and schedule. It is also essential that you communicate this information to the community service and employment agencies prior to the job fair so that they can screen and if necessary train the applicant. The more information you have the greater the comfort level.

By working closely with those agencies you will assure a greater likelihood of a correct match-up between job and applicant.

3. **Sensitivity to the Applicant.** Also in conjunction with the community service and employment agencies, be sure that you are aware of and sensitive to the needs of applicants from a culture which is likely to be quite different from your own. In terms of language, culture, education, family structure and career expectations, many inner-city candidates bring very different backgrounds to this process.

Section five of this manual, *The Employers Role*, goes into this area in detail. But in general, sensitivity to the needs of the applicants is paramount in ensuring a good “fit” and a level of comfort in your organization.

The theme of your involvement in the Fair must be:

**AVAILABLE JOBS/
CLEAR QUALIFICATIONS**

**APPLICANT'S SPECIAL NEEDS/
COMMITMENT TO HIRE**

Government

Governmental support for the project is essential. As a facilitator and a catalyst in the process, there are a great many functions that you can play at the job fair. The essential ones include:

1. ***Provide Vision and Leadership.*** By inviting county commissioners, mayors and legislators, you can bring to the job fair a visible sign of “official” support — a sense that the community as a whole is behind the project. These people can often provide a sense of direction and a sense of the big picture. Their leadership should make the linkage between the self interest of individual collaboration and the greater good of the community as a whole.
2. ***Underwrite the Costs of the Event.*** Since donations and participant fees are not likely to completely support the event, it will fall to government to provide the money to underwrite the cost of these events.

In the Minneapolis project, Hennepin County funds:

- Provided a full-time project manager to coordinate the Job Fair.
- Paid the costs of providing free bus transportation to and from the Job Fair.
- Provided funds for newspaper advertising.

The theme of your involvement in the Fair must be:

VISION / LEADERSHIP / SUPPORT

Training and Employment Agencies

In this category are included: Job Banks, State or Public Job Services and Community Training and Employment Agencies. You may know of other similar organizations in your community.

These organizations are generally not newcomers to Job Fairs. Indeed, they will likely have been participants and sponsored Job Fairs as part of their standard procedure for years. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the kinds of issues that determine the success and failure of such an endeavor.

The section of this manual titled *Training and Employment Agencies/Community Service Agencies*, will go through these issues in detail, but for our purpose here — to overview the general process for setting up a Job Fair to promote Reverse Commuting — we need to focus on three areas.

➤ **Correct Expectations**

The Job Fair needs to be set up to meet the needs of potential workers at the Job Fair itself. Most of this task falls, of course, to the employers and the transit agencies, but as an organization sending people to this fair, you need to insure that:

- **Hiring Will Take Place** — Assurance that employers are coming to the fair with available jobs and a desire to fill the jobs with candidates in attendance.
- **Employers are Sensitive to the Needs of the Applicants** — Assurance that companies providing employment have knowledge of and sensitivity to the audience they will be interviewing.
- **You Know What Companies Will Be Participating** — Assurance that you have knowledge of the companies, the type of jobs, the hours, the skills, the approximate salaries and other requirements of the jobs to be offered.
- **Transportation Is In Place** — Assurance that the transit agencies have real or potential routes already established, or ready to be established.

You don't want the situation of people being "all dressed up with no where to go." Be sure that the job fair will offer real jobs and real transportation — in real time.

Training and Employment Agencies

➤ Prepared Candidates

Nobody wants to be set up to fail. Therefore it is essential to make sure job applicants are prepared — professionally and emotionally — to attend the fair. Make sure that:

- **Awareness** — Applicants are aware of exactly what jobs are available and what the requirements of these jobs are.
- **Qualified** — Applicants have the skills to meet the requirements of the jobs being offered.
- **Prepared** — Applicants have already filled out applications which they can either present to a potential employer or use to complete the employers application form.

Overall you want the job fair to be a positive experience for the applicant. As a result there must be clear expectations on the part of the applicant as to exactly what will happen.

➤ Prepared Training and Employment Agencies

No matter how hard you have worked to prepare your candidates referrals, things can still go wrong. So, at the Job Fair, make sure that:

- Qualified people from your agency or organization are available to help out and deal with any questions, problems or issues that come up.

The overall job of the training and employment agencies in the Job Fair is to facilitate a “fit” between the job seeker and the employer — that is the jobs, the skills, the hours, the pay and the transportation. Also be aware that the cultural expectations and sensitivities mesh as well.

The theme of your involvement in the Fair must be:

NO SURPRISES!

Transit Agencies

Since the transit agencies will be the ultimate link — the means of transportation — between the employees and the jobs, it is essential to have clear options and directions available for the job fair.

1. **Transportation to the Job Fair.** Since we have chosen to conduct the Job Fair in the suburbs as a kind of “willingness test,” there must be direct transportation to the job fair. For this initial experience, the best option is probably a bus that takes people directly from the community service agency to the Job Fair site — and back again. This information should be published through the media and by the Jobs and Training Agencies.

Providing service on an established route which simulates regular service which will remain in place after the Job Fair is a good idea. A route beginning at City Center, or a main downtown transit hub, is also a good choice because it minimizes the use of existing route connections.

2. **Information About Routes and Times.** To the extent possible, you will want to establish and publish the exact routes and times that will be in place once the people begin work. If such information cannot be firmly established, then there is an even greater need for the next area.
3. **Clear Directions.** Establish very clear directions regarding the on going use of the proposed transportation system. This element is perhaps the most important aspect of your activity. Particularly if there are variations in schedules or if people need to call to schedule service or receive information, it is essential that the potential employees know *exactly* how to do it. Regular daily service in the Minneapolis project utilized a reservation system for riders.

Also, because suburbs — unlike inner cities — tend not to be laid out in grid patterns and often have winding streets and because businesses tend to have large grounds surrounding them, accurate directions are essential.

In the *Transit* section of this manual, there is more information regarding these points, especially the third point, educating people about and helping them use your system.

The theme of your involvement in the Fair must be:

AVAILABILITY & CLARITY

Summary

In these first two sections we have covered the following:

OVERVIEW

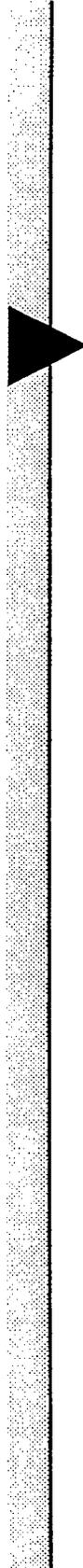
- **The Issue.** The needs of suburban employees and inner-city workers.
- **Who and How.** Who should read this manual and how best to proceed through it.
- **Context.** The history and background of the program; the scope and goals of the program; the benefits to stakeholders; and the need for collaboration and cooperation.

THE JOB FAIR

- **Getting Started.** Putting the pieces in place; establishing a network of support.
- **Readiness.** Asking the key questions and determining your readiness to undertake such a project.
- **Mission.** Developing a mission statement and creating a “core.”
- **The Job Fair.** Attending to the details of the actual Job Fair. Specifically, addressing such issues as preparation, advertising, logistics, agenda, materials, support staff, preparing the employers and employees, and follow up.
- **Specific Details.** More detailed information and suggestions for the major stakeholders: Training and Employment Agencies, Community Service Agencies, Employers, Transit Agencies and Government.

Hopefully the aims and direction of the program are now clear. Also, we trust that you now have a grasp of the basic roles of the major stakeholders in the process, as well as a detailed understanding of the purpose and process of a Job Fair.

Now — down to details. The following sections will cover some of the vital data and information for the major stakeholders, and then conclude with a section of Critical Success Factors and a wrap up.



Section One

**The Role of
Business**

Show Me!

Asked what advice he would give to anybody starting a Reverse Commute program in an organization, one staunch supporter offered these words of advice:

"Don't let the 'It can't be done' people rule."

There are, he confided, a host of reasons why hiring people from the inner city "can't be done." They include:

- **There aren't any busses.**
- **Those people don't have cars.**
- **We need people whose schedules are feasible.**
- **They don't have the skill.**
- **We don't want people like that out here.**
- **They aren't reliable.**
- **It's just gonna add to our problems.**
- **It'll take too long to get them up to speed.**
- **Those things don't work.**
- **We don't need any more complexity.**
- **We have to have a commitment.**

Show Me!

As you can see, these reasons are all over the map, but break down into the following three basic categories:

- Rigidity — Unwillingness to bend the rules of the system.
- Bias and Fear — Presuppositions about “those” people.
- Resistance to Change — Fear of complexity.

As a result, introducing such a program into a suburban organization will be a process of bucking the system. Moreover, many of the reasons why the program “can’t be done” will be so-called rational and organizationally sound reasons which are in reality only fronts for deeper biases and fears.

You have your work cut out for you.

Therefore, it is a gross understatement to say that promoting such a program requires commitment and patience.

What It Will Take

To undertake such a project requires that you:

- Take a good look at yourself.
- Take a good look at your organization.
- Develop a strategy.

Let's start with you.

Self Management

How deeply do you *believe* in this project?

Just agreeing with the logic or thinking it's a good idea is not enough. When you are up against an entrenched system, as well as certain individuals who may be motivated by bias, it takes a good deal more than a simple agreement to persevere.

It takes a belief that in spite of obstacles and inevitable failures or setbacks, you are committed to the project — *believe* in its goals — are willing to fight for its success.

To help you in this regard, here are a few things you should start to consider as "normal":

- Here's another job I don't get paid for.
- Some people aren't going to like me.
- Three steps forward; two steps back.
- When it succeeds, someone else will likely take the credit.
- The organization will resist bending its policies and norms.

Now, having said this — having forewarned you — you can also expect ... in the long run:

- A sense of personal satisfaction.
- Pieces will begin to fall in place.
- The program *will* eventually get going.

Just be ready.

The Flow of the Process

In general, starting such a program proceeds through a series of steps or stages:

1. **Identifying and Defining the Need**
2. **Finding a New Employment Source**
3. **Management Buy-In**
4. **Addressing” Organizational Receptivity”**
5. **Building An Internal Strategy**
6. **Addressing Special Needs**
7. **On-Going Support**

These general stages tend to overlap each other, and they won't always go exactly in order, but in general, defining these steps is a good way to get an initial fix on the flow of the process.

Let's take them in order.

I

Identifying and Defining the Need

Presumably, the reason any organization would look to alternative employment sources is because its current sources are not meeting your current needs. Normally, you would put an ad in the paper or advertise jobs in other “standard” ways, and wait for the applicants to show up.

When this doesn't work, you know you have a problem. Typically, organizations in outer-ring suburbs tend to go “outward,” i.e., into the neighboring rural or semi-rural areas. And when this strategy does not produce the needed applicants, then you are in a position to consider going “inward”; toward the inner city.

The point here is simply, look at all your options and practices and based on the results, if you have a problem, be prepared to shift your strategy to the inner city recognizing that a *very different set of rules, expectations and requirements will apply when you decide to take this option.*

Be prepared.

The Flow of the Process

2

Finding A New Employment Source

There are a variety of city, county, state and community agencies that may be the source of your potential employees. In all likelihood, however, you'll be working with some form of employment service agency.

These organizations are, after all, the most likely source of the labor pool from which you plan to draw. The more you know about them and the people they represent, the better chance for success.

You will also want to read Section Three of this manual: "Training and Employment Agencies and Community Service Agencies." It will give you insight into the jobs of these agencies in the overall plan.

Some other helpful hints in working with these agencies are:

Hold meetings at both your location and theirs.

- *Visits to Service Agencies* — Go to their location in the inner city. Meet the staff, meet the people, see how they work. There is no substitute for "being there" to get a feel for the issues you will have to manage.
- *Plant Visits* — Also arrange for staff members of these agencies and potential workers to meet at your organization. This will provide a valuable reality check both for them and for the people in your organization.

Nothing breaks down preconceptions faster than the real thing. When people from the inner city see that the suburbs aren't so foreign, and when people from your organization discover that "these people" have legitimate wants and needs, there is a greater likelihood for increased comfort and success.

Obviously, these mutual visits represent a variation from your "standard" hiring practices. Considered by some to be "hand holding," it is actually the necessary initial phase of developing a new relationship and a plan for working together.

The Flow of the Process

Understand Each Others' Needs And Each Others' "Cultures"

The success of a reverse commute program is ultimately a function of two culture's willingness to understand and bend to each others' needs.

Meeting on each others' "turf" is only the first step to balancing out what may — at first — be a significantly different way of looking at the world.

Again, Section Three is a good resource for understanding the Training and Employment agencies' role in the process. On your end, your job is basically to:

Clarify Your Organization's Norms and Expectations.

The Training and Employment agencies are likely to have a pretty good idea of "what is expected" in your culture. But when communicating with them be sure to address your expectations in these areas.

- *Work Ethic* — Such things as being on time, follow through and the procedures for notifying the company if a person can't make it to work.
- *Teamwork* — Expectations about how people in your organization work together; the individual's responsibilities to the team.
- *Asking for Help* — That asking for help is not a sign of failure; methods for actually doing the asking.
- *Decorum* — Matters of dress, language and general behavior on the job.

These issues can be touchy at times, and can even verge on being potentially judgmental. But there is a great need to get "down and dirty" about these basic issues. Violating cultural norms can spell trouble very quickly if these differences are not clarified.

In any case, meeting each other early on in the process — face-to-face — is a key step in both sides getting more comfortable with each other.

The Flow of the Process

3

Management Buy-In

A good idea is only as good as the support it gets. If there is no support for such a program within the organization, it will die for lack of a second.

As a result, you need, immediately on embarking on such a project, to begin to develop internal support.

The key is:

Aim High.

To garner the full measure of support both at the initial meeting and within the organization, you will have to secure the support or at least participation of people at certain levels in the organization. Without “support in high places” projects such as these are often doomed to failure or lack of adequate staying power.

Key people you should include are:

- *Human Resources Personnel* — A natural area for support is the human resources area. Not only are they instrumental in hiring, but may also be interested and invested to some degree in attracting employees from varying socio-economic and racial groups.
- *Executive Vice President ... or Above* — The reality of organizational life — especially with a program such as the reverse commute program — is that “power talks.” Not only do you need to enlist people at this level for support within the company, these people are also likely to tell their peers in other organizations.
- *Hiring Managers* — Also try to gain the support of the people who are actually going to do the hiring. Once convinced of the value of the program, they can be strong advocates, supporting it at the tactical level.

4

Addressing “Organizational Receptivity”

Is your organization a “receptive host?” Or will it reject the new addition? Probably the latter. As a result, here are some key areas you will probably need to investigate before taking any direct action.

The Flow of the Process

- *Benefits* —What percentage of time does an employee have to work in order to be eligible for benefits? Half time? Full time?

Does your organization make a practice of hiring people just below that level to avoid paying benefits?

Would they be willing to change or bend that policy to hire inner city workers?

What would it take for you to change that policy?

- *“Slots”* —The beginnings of programs like these almost always arise from clear needs in specific areas — that is, jobs are “slots” to be filled in certain job classifications.

But are these the only areas where there are needs? There is a tendency to see the jobs only in those areas the organization has decided it is deficient. But often there are other areas in the organization where potential jobs exist.

Or there is the opportunity to *create* jobs.

In short, don't pigeonhole the available jobs to just the “slots” identified as need areas. Assess the needs in a wide number of areas to see if there are potential matches to the skills of the inner city applicant.

- *Links* —Try to discover: are there any people or organizations who currently use vans or buses now? Are there other transit agencies or services or programs such as the Red Cross, churches, the United Way, Handi-Cabs or Company van?

Also businesses can often get grants supporting specialized commuting efforts.

The key is to be resourceful; be creative; look around and see what currently exists.

The Flow of the Process

- *Scheduling* — How rigid is your organizations work day? Does it tend to operate in terms of specific shifts that run on a rigid time table — no exceptions? Or is it flexible, willing to bend to accommodate and to meet peoples' needs.

And if it is rigid, to what extent can you change it?

- *Inner City "Competition"* — Are you prepared to "compete" with the inner city, i.e., are you willing to pay more than a comparable job in the inner city?

Often the market takes care of this issue — exactly *because* of the difficulty to fill certain jobs, employers will pay more for a job in the suburbs than would be paid for the same job in the cities.

But if the current rates are the same, what is the incentive for somebody from the inner city to travel to your location — all that time, trouble and expense — for the same pay?

Probably not, unless there is a career path which can lead to better opportunities in the future.

These are key issues that you may have to face; and it may require you to pay increased wages to attract workers.

5

Building an Internal Strategy

Once you have tested your own readiness, and once you have looked at some of the key areas in your organization as to their current policy, you are ready to venture into the process of becoming an advocate.

Probably one of the most effective ways to get a foothold is to do two things, both of which work in conjunction with each other:

AIM HIGH & CREATE AN EVENT.

Lets start with the "event."

The Flow of the Process

Create An Event

As you have already perhaps surmised from reading the Job Fair section of this manual, progress in this project is often “event driven.”

The first event — in your organization — should probably be a meeting. People have told us that peddling the project door to door, person to person tends not to work. Too many “can’t be dones.”

So the first “event” should probably be a meeting of some kind which you invite interested parties and key people. The meeting itself lends a certain degree of credence to the project as a whole and, by agreeing to attend, people have tacitly agreed to “hear you out.”

Who you invite to this meeting will vary, but these are some key things you may want to be sure to attend to.

- *Clear Goals* — Have a simple, clear statement of the program, its goals and outcomes.
- *Do Your Homework* — Demonstrate that you have investigated the issues, opportunities and problems within your organization.
- *Advocacy* — To the extent possible, include people both inside and outside the organization who support the program and its goals.
- *First Steps* — Lay out, if not a full blown strategy, at least some concrete first steps that can be taken.
- *Support* — Appeal for support in implementing the program.

A meeting such as this can lend credibility and recognition to the program. It can be a point from which people “mark time,” i.e., they generally acknowledged *beginning* of the process.

The Flow of the Process

6

Addressing Special Needs

Once the program starts, you will need to be sensitive to and address a multiplicity of issues that will arise. Some basic things you can do to prepare for these needs and issues are:

Accept and Understand the Cultural Norms of Your New Employees.

Even though you are the host — and the dominant “culture” — there is a need to both see and accept many of the norms of your new employees.

Your best sources for information regarding these differences are the community service agencies.

In general, however, misunderstandings in this area come in the form of seemingly small things that need to be addressed on an individual basis.

For example, after working out the transportation and scheduling details for several workers, one of them — a woman — said she wanted to be home at lunchtime for her kids. This request triggered the following responses on the part of the employer:

- After going through all this hassle, now she wants a special round trip to her home and back — in the middle of the day!
- She should get her own coverage for her kids.
- She’s got nerve.
- We can’t run a business to meet her whims.
- We don’t do that for others, why should she be special.

The woman’s point of view was simply that it was important to be there for her kids. This is a small but noteworthy example. Her request triggered reaction and differences. Lately, by simply listening and legitimizing the needs of the women and the company, a solution — job sharing with another woman — was worked out.

The Flow of the Process

Differences like these — seemingly small things — tend to result in reactions and defensiveness, but with a little empathy and negotiating, can usually be worked out. It will take a while for the “cultures” to fully understand each other. In the mean time, we need to explore and problem solve before we react.

Diversity Awareness

It may also be necessary to conduct some kind of diversity training within your organization. Such programs are already underway in many organizations. Typically, these programs take the following forms.

- *Diversity Training* — Organization-wide program to educate and sensitize people to each other’s culture.
- *Supervisory Coaching* — Smaller-scale programs, targeted to supervisors, to help them understand the needs and dynamics of a group of employees from different cultural groups.

In any event, some form of preparation for both cultures — to understand the norms of the other culture — is a key part in the process as a whole.

7

On-Going Support

Just starting a Reverse Commute program is only the first step. Obviously, as the program evolves and needs change, you will have to be on your toes to deal with whatever comes up.

Spinning Plates

In all, the total process is not unlike the classic entertainer who tries to get a dozen plates spinning at the same time. He runs back and forth, starting and restarting the plates, until he has them all going at once.

That is in many ways, what your job is likely to resemble.

The Flow of the Process

General Suggestions

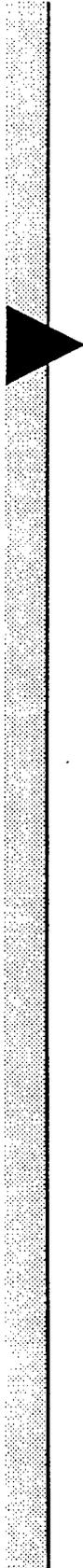
Here are other general ideas and suggestions that may be helpful to you in setting up a supporting program.

- *Make a big deal out of small steps* — Try to play up and publicize small gains in the process — especially at the beginning. Progress is measured one step at a time, so when you're trying to gain a foothold, make the most of any progress you achieve. Focus on thanks and recognition.
- *Work with the Chamber of Commerce* — They have the same general goals as you do. Also, they may be a source for support and for letting other companies know what you are doing.
- *Work with the transit agencies but don't depend on them* — They have logistics to work out as well. The full responsibility for transportation on the transit organizations should not fall on them. Also, other sources of transportation should always be an option.
- *Look to already existing bus lines that run near you* — Maybe for a mall or shopping center not far from you. (For more information regarding this area, see the section that covers transportation companies.)
- *Let elected officials take credit* — Once a program gets going, elected officials may come onto the scene and seem to want to take credit for your project. The rule of thumb is: "Ride the horse in the direction it's going." If letting them take some credit will help the program, so much the better.
- *Newspaper and media exposure can constantly help your program* — But a story about problems or a failure can also hurt your program. Remember the nature of the media: Bad news sells better than good news. So, be aware.

Strategy Revisited

In summary, the general steps in the process are:

- 1 Identifying and Defining the Need.** Check out your potential sources of employment and define the kinds of jobs that you will need to fill and the skills required for these jobs.
- 2 Finding a New Employment Source.** When looking for potential new sources of workers, be sure to fully investigate all the options including inner-city jobs and training agencies. Plan mutual visits to allow both organizations to become comfortable with each other.
- 3 Management Buy-In.** Begin early to build support at the top levels of your organization.
- 4 Address “Organizational Receptivity.”** Look closely at the current rules, regulations, policies and procedures of your organization to see where there will be a fit and where you will have to bend or change rules to accommodate the project.
- 5 Build An Internal Strategy.** Start to put together an infrastructure of support — both personal and organizational — to help the program succeed.
- 6 Addressing Special Needs.** Be aware and sensitive to a multiplicity of special needs, situations and cases that are going to arise once the program is up and running.
- 7 On-Going Support.** Pay attention to internal as well as external sources of support of the program.



Section Two

**The Role of
Government**

In A Perfect World ...

In a perfect world there would be no need to make a special project of a Reverse Commute Program — because the government would already be seeing to it that the program was up and running

The reasons for government support are obvious. Such a program:

- Provides employment
- Reduces welfare dependence
- Creates taxpayers
- Increases the standard of living
- Supports economic development
- Increases the self esteem of citizens
- Contributes to the revitalization of inner city neighborhoods

Why, if all these things are true — which they are — wouldn't the government initiate and support Reverse Commute programs?

The answer is: Because there are so many elements that have to come together to make such a program succeed, what is needed is a collaborative team effort. Such a program cannot be started by the efforts of one organization. And certainly, it cannot be initiated by a top-down government effort.

So, what is the role of government in this endeavor?

Basically the role of government in this regard is that of *support* — the support and *coordination* of grassroots efforts already underway in one form or another.

Government

Once there is some interest and action, government agencies can come in and provide:

1 Leadership/Facilitation

2 Barrier Removal

At that point, it can move on to the specific areas of:

3 Garnering Support

4 Focusing on the County

5 Building a Critical Mass

6 Starting Small

Involvement Strategy

As we have already covered in the introduction, the Reverse Commute program in the Twin Cities area came about originally because of one company's need for workers. As this individual project began to expand and grow, the government became involved generally in the following ways:

1

Leadership/Facilitation. A county commissioner who represented one inner city district from which the employees would come, heard about the efforts and began to scout around to see how he could help it along — acting as a catalyst for continued action.

The county director of Training and Employment became involved, and, with others, began to talk to a variety of interested parties such as businesses, transit companies, Chambers of Commerce in suburban locations and social service organizations.

2

Barrier Removal. Because of their positions and their knowledge of "The System," these people were able to appropriate money and pass legislation to make the process flow more easily.

At that point it moved into the specific activities described below.

3

Garnering Support

If you are in a governmental agency or position, you probably have a good idea how you might be able to support a burgeoning Reverse Commute program. The people and agencies of the government that you may want to team up with in supporting the process are as follows:

➤ **Legislators and Officers**

Representatives from districts that stand to benefit either from the employment of their constituents or the filling of jobs in their district, thus ensuring the continued growth of the community.

Also, this classification includes city council members, county commissioners, mayors, the governor, as well as directors of city, county and state jobs and training personnel departments.

➤ **Training and Employment or Economic Development Office**

Those people and agencies responsible for stimulating the economic growth of a city, county or state.

Involvement Strategy

- **Welfare Office**
Those agencies that have an interest in getting people off welfare and into employment.

- **Housing and Redevelopment**
These agencies may stand to both benefit and support a program of increased employment.

- **Training and Employment**
Those agencies providing training and seeking jobs for the unemployed or underemployed.

4

The County As The Key

Perhaps the key governmental agency in the support of a Reverse Commute program is the county. The reasons for this key role are fairly straightforward:

- Whereas individual cities and municipalities are likely to be aware of and support their own interests, the county is likely to be able to take in a larger perspective that includes the interests of all the communities within its boundaries.

- The county is in a better position to be a clearing house for information concerning the interests of various companies and social agencies.

- County programs for employment and economic development are larger and more widespread than those of the individual municipalities.

- The county may well be in a good position to appropriate funding to start such a program.

- The county is apt to be perceived as more “neutral” than other governmental agencies.

In short, the county — its people and resources — are in the best position to lead and coordinate the program.

Involvement Strategy

If you do not have county support for your program, or proposed program, then getting that support should be your first priority.

NOTE: Having mentioned the central role of the county in the process, we need to mention that there are also other non-county organizations that can play a central role in the reverse commute program — for example, the Metropolitan Planning Organization or other similar organizations having responsibility for employment, housing, economic development or transit.

5

Build a Critical Mass

In describing its involvement in the start up of the Twin Cities Reverse Commute program, we heard the following statements again and again from the governmental agencies and personnel involved:

“This is not a smooth road”

“You can’t imagine the things we had to deal with”

“This will be tough”

“It took a lot of talking”

“Build a critical mass”

“Start small”

Because of the complexity of the task and the diversity of the stakeholders involved, a top-down governmental — throw-money-at-the-situation — will not work. The key, as we have stressed throughout this manual, is *teamwork* and *collaboration*; the bringing together of a tremendous number of people and interests. So to begin, instead of taking on a huge, grandiose project, build a critical mass and start small.

If not already apparent, you need to uncover suburban businesses that are having difficulty filling their jobs. Increasingly, businesses with such needs are multiplying rapidly. Ideally, you can locate one which has already taken some steps to get workers to its location. Perhaps there are several companies in the same area — for example in an industrial or business “park” — with similar employment needs.

Involvement Strategy

In any case, start with this core and build a critical mass: a small-scale working example of what you eventually want to see happening on a large scale.

Once you have identified the companies with the needs, next contact various training and employment agencies to begin to identify potential workers.

When you have these two needs identified, you are ready to make the first link.

6

Start Small

We found that a van — or perhaps a cab service — is the next best step in the process. Let's say you can contract a van which seats 9-12 people, and guarantee roughly that many people on a regular basis will ride the van to and from the place of work.

At this point, work out the details and logistics of this small scale Reverse Commute until it's working smoothly. You can then use the van and its riders as a solid example of how such a program can work. In short, it will become a real-life example — on a small scale — of a viable program.

Also, in setting up and working out the kinks of that one van and its riders, you will go to school on the potential program as a whole.

You are likely to discover, in miniature, the issues, problems and needs you will have to deal with when you expand the program.

This working example will also serve as an "advertisement" for the program. Other interested companies and organizations will want to know "how can we get one of those vans?"

If our experience is any measure of what you may experience, starting small will involve plenty of work and cooperation.

Once the program is in place on a small scale, you can begin to interact with the other stakeholders to expand the program. These stakeholders include:

- Transit Companies
- Training and Employment Agencies
- Employers
- Government Agencies
- Chambers of Commerce

Strategy Revisited

In summary, the key areas in the process are:

GENERAL SUPPORT

1

Leadership and Facilitation. Government can play a key role as the initiator of the process, providing leadership and the means to start and sustain the program.

2

Barrier Removal. Because of its position and knowledge, government can work the “system” or work “on the inside” to provide money and streamline the process.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

3

Garner Support. Influence other people and agencies to team up and support a process which in some way will reinforce or expand their current efforts and best interests.

4

Focus on the County. Because of the size and scope of its programs and outreach, the county is probably the best place to begin promoting the project.

5

Build a Critical Mass. Pull together a focused group of interested parties and formulate a means to target specific needs.

6

Start Small. Begin with a “pilot” or trial program — a small-scale, targeted activity to get workers to specific jobs.

Once the support is in place, a small project is up and running and the various agencies and interests are working in concert, then — and only then — formulate ways to grow and expand the program.



Section Three

**The Role of the
Chamber of
Commerce**

The Chamber of Commerce

An organization which plays a key role — both for initiation and ongoing support of a reverse commute program — is the Chamber of Commerce, or rather, the Chambers of Commerce in the various communities promoting the Reverse Commute Program.

In our case, it was actually the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce who in many ways got the ball rolling. It was their transportation committee that first began to explore in earnest the idea of a reverse commute.

The important point to remember here is that they were responding to a need expressed by their member businesses — namely, the need to attract workers to the expanding business base in the community.

In effect they were working backward from their need to get people for jobs in their community, and began to build a network that ultimately came to include local businesses, other Chambers of Commerce in neighboring communities, employment agencies, transit companies and governmental agencies.

These activities led to a special “reverse commute” committee and ultimately the Job Fair.

It is not unlikely then that the genesis or at least a prime mover in any budding reverse commute program will be the actual business interests that stand to gain employment from the project. And there is no better focus for the business interests in a community than the Chamber of Commerce.

The primary issues to be considered by the Chamber of Commerce are very similar to the issues that are discussed in more detail in the other chapters. Thus, our purpose here is to outline some of the key roles and functions of Chambers of Commerce in the program as a whole. They include:

- The Potential “Prime Mover”
- Diversity Issues
- Communication Network
- Other Chambers of Commerce
- Administrative Support
- Planning

The Chamber of Commerce

1

The Potential “Prime Mover”

As mentioned, the Chamber of Commerce is likely to be the point where the need for such a program surfaces. When communities are experiencing difficulty in getting people for jobs, a program like this one is apt to gain support.

Of course there needs to be a “critical mass” of need. To try and garner support when the need really isn’t present is likely to result in a lack of enthusiasm and commitment. Therefore, the Chamber as an organization representing the needs of the local business community is the natural forum where discussion of employment and transit issues is likely to occur. The Chamber’s role is to find areas of common interest among member businesses and facilitate collaborative action on these issues.

2

Diversity Issues

Since a reverse commute program is likely to result in primarily minority workers going to primarily white suburbs, diversity immediately becomes an issue.

Therefore, it may fall to the Chamber of Commerce to first raise the issue of awareness of the community and its businesses. In short, the Chamber is in a good position to deal with the issue before it becomes an “issue” — to nip problems in the bud through awareness and communication.

3

Communication Network

Whether for purposes of publicizing the effort, dealing with diversity or whatever, the Chamber is likely to have a communication network — both formal and informal — that can play an important role in the evolution of the project.

Whether via formal newsletters or periodic publication on the one hand, or the informal network of mutual influence and acquaintanceship on the other, a Chamber is generally able to communicate in a wide and efficient manner.

This network is an obvious asset in the promoting of information and updates to get people and business to support such a program.

The Chamber of Commerce

One specific example to support the value of this network is the community whose employers could only offer half shifts. Since the commute schedules and the workers favored full shifts, there was a problem.

Then, by communicating, the employers with the half shifts found they could team up and offer individuals split shift work — half a day at one business, half a day at another.

Only through close communication and collaboration within the community could this solution have been found.

4

Other Chambers of Commerce

Also, the Chamber is in contact with other Chambers. Often it will be in the best interest of several communities to join forces and collaborate on a program to reach — and therefore to benefit — a number of communities. Without this combined effort, the critical mass needed to achieve a successful Job Fair and adequate ridership to support the bus routes would not have occurred in our project.

5

Administrative Support

The staff of the Chamber can also be an extremely valuable asset in promoting the program. For simple follow up, keeping track of progress, communication and the like, the in-place staff of the Chamber can be a fixed support base for a wide variety of activities, i.e., handling meeting agendas and minutes, correspondence, preparation of materials for meetings or for a Job Fair, as well as staff support at the Job Fair to register participants and distribute materials.

6

Have a Plan

A final piece of advice to the Chambers thinking about getting involved in a reverse commute program is — have a *plan*.

The Chamber of Commerce

There is a lot of difference between a “good idea” and a successful program — or for that matter, between simple enthusiasm and a successful program.

As one Chamber director put it, “this thing won’t just *happen*. It has to be planned.”

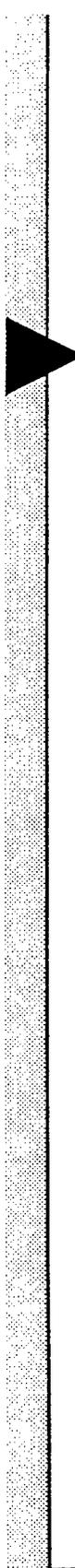
Every community is different. They may have similar general needs, but the specifics — the way it will play out — will vary widely. So, before embarking on such a program, it is wise to think it through thoroughly in terms of your desired outcomes and your community’s needs.

But whatever the outcome, the Chamber of Commerce is in a unique position to support a reverse commute program.

Strategy Revisited

In summary, the general areas you need to focus on are:

- 1** **The Potential “Prime Mover.”** Because of your high visibility, you have a unique opportunity to build support for the program.
- 2** **Diversity Issues.** You have a responsibility to raise and deal with diversity issues in the community.
- 3** **Communication Network.** Your existing communication network can be very useful for publicizing and promoting the program.
- 4** **Other Chambers of Commerce.** Because of common interests and mutual benefit, you may be well advised to partner with other Chambers.
- 5** **Administrative Support.** Your administrative support staff can be very valuable to the program — especially the Job Fair.
- 6** **Have a Plan.** Nothing happens by itself. Have a well thought-out plan.



Section Four

**The Role of
Training and
Employment
Agencies and
Community
Service
Agencies**

Training and Employment Agencies and Community Service Agencies — What Are They?

What we are referring to generally as training and employment agencies or community service agencies are any organizations set up primarily to meet the employment, housing and basic educational needs of people in specific neighborhoods or sections of the city. These agencies also include state, city, and county employment agencies, as well as non-profit agencies.

In Minneapolis, there is a group of such organizations known as the Neighborhood Employment Network or NET Agencies. On pages 62-63 in the Appendix is a listing of these agencies and the services of the Loring Nicollet Bethlehem Community Centers Inc., one of ten such agencies in Minneapolis.

You may have organizations in your community that are similar to these private non-profit NET agencies. You may also have government agencies that fill this role. If you do not have such organizations in your community, you may want to start the process of beginning some. In general, we found that the private non-profit agencies took a more aggressive and innovative approach to the jobs and training issues confronting our project. There has been an entrepreneurial rather than a bureaucratic spirit to their involvement.

Whatever the case, the information in this section will cover the role of these organizations in a Reverse Commute program.

To begin, the primary distinction that needs to be made is this: Community service centers tend traditionally to work *within* the community they serve. In the case of the Reverse Commute program, they will have to work, in part, outside of the community they serve. More specifically, they are trying to link up people who need jobs in one area of the city with available jobs in the wider metropolitan area. Thus the major theme of this function is how to facilitate this connection. The best strategy is to first establish contact with the employers and get information regarding shift starts, times and other scheduling matters, and then work backwards to set up transportation schedules. It will be rough at first, but as the program develops, a smoother operation will evolve.

At A Glance

Job Seeker Population: Community Service Organizations get a wide variety of applicants — clients — from people with college degrees to people with little education and job experience. Some of these clients have just moved into the community, while others may be recovering from addiction or just recently released from prison. Many also arrive with marginal work histories and minimal job-seeking skills. Thus the overall theme of this section is:

Assessment

Making sure the client has the necessary skills and frame of mind for the job — the ability to identify the individual's skills and match those skills to an appropriate job.

1

Employers' Expectations — Covering the process of finding appropriate openings in the participating business, creating relationships and credibility with employers, and the creation of an ongoing linkage and feedback with that business for the purpose of continued growth and understanding.

2

Resume Writing — How to write a good resume, and why a resume is so important.

3

Interview Practices — A key area, especially for people who have little or no experience in interviewing. This area includes:

- Questions to ask
- Questions you may be asked
- Your reason for leaving your previous position
- Selling yourself and your skills

4

Keeping a Job — Finding a job is one thing, but keeping it is another. Long-term success rides on a labor force that lasts. Personal long-term success similarly is a function of sticking with a job and turning it into promotions, movement and a career.

5

Self Esteem — The primary issues that will aid applicants in maintaining their self esteem during this process.

6

Strategies for Support — Discussing the various reactions of people to the job-getting process and suggesting strategies to support people in this process.

I Employers' Expectations

The task of creating a receptive employer falls primarily to the employers themselves, but there are some things that service agencies can do to aid in this process.

➤ Meet With The Human Resource People

It is the job of the human resource (HR) people to work in the areas of workforce diversity and sensitivity in hiring practices. Therefore, be sure to talk to or meet with these people, provided the organization has an HR staff or function. They will aid you in getting to know how to operate in that company. They will also know specific rules regarding, for example, the hiring of convicted felons or drug abusers.

➤ Meet With The Hiring Manager

Perhaps more effective than meeting with HR personnel is meeting with the actual hiring manager. What this person may lack in human resource expertise and sensitivity, he or she may more than make up for in down to earth, honest, straightforwardness and realism.

From this person you can find out

- Exactly what jobs are open?
- Why are these positions available?
- What skills are required?
- What kind of person he or she is looking for? What is the profile of a successful worker?
- What preferences and biases may exist with that manager, co-workers or in the whole culture?
- What the past experiences have been (if any) in hiring people from the inner city.

By contacting both the HR people and the hiring manager, you will gain a wider perspective, and therefore make it easier, at least more efficient, to place the right people in the best jobs.

2 Resume Writing

Writing a good resume has two very important functions in the job seeking process:

- To overview your education, experience and personal data,
- To demonstrate a certain degree of “professionalism” employers are looking for.

The first area is the obvious use for a resume. Let’s cover this one first.

Basic Data

Experience has shown that employers want five basic things on a resume; Personal Information, Education and Training, Skills, and References. Included in the Appendix is a sample “Resume Worksheet” for building a good resume. The rationale behind the five areas is as follows:

Personal Information — Basic necessary information: name, address and phone number.

Education and Training — A quick glance at your formal and job related education.

Experience — Listing your last employer first, this section gives the employer a sense of your experience and the amount of time spent at your jobs.

Skills — A short list of your basic skills.

References — Try to get three good references.

Employers tend often to “scan” resumes. Therefore you want to keep them simple and clear. You want the basic information to stand out. In addition to the basic information it provides, a good resume also “talks” for the applicant — for his or her professionalism.

Resume Writing

Demonstrated Professionalism

The fact that an applicant has a resume — no matter what level the job — is a demonstration to an employer that the person has a degree of “professionalism,” i.e., they take work seriously, they have desire, they have a track record and they know who they are.

These are subjective but very important aspects in the process as a whole. “If a person can’t even take the time to prepare a resume,” an employer may think, “What kind of employee will he or she make?”

Also, a resume forces applicants to think through who they are, where they’ve been and what they want. It brings a *focus* to a person’s self assessment and therefore a greater chance for clarity when they talk about their experience.

A good resume is the door to the application process.

3 Interview Practices

The resume is the door, but the interview is where the applicant makes it or breaks it. Employers use the interview to 1) Select the best from a number of equally qualified people, and 2) To see if there is a fit between the applicant and the organization. Particularly in a Reverse Commute situation, where applicants from the inner city will be going to the suburbs, the interview is the key.

The primary need of service organizations is to prepare their clients so that they will not be caught flatfooted by specific questions or by the process as a whole. Two aspects of the interview must be kept in mind:

- *Answers* — What you say
- *Attitude* — How you say it, what you “project”

It is not so important to have the “right” answers, as it is to have “good” answers to key questions potential employers ask — honest, straightforward answers that the applicant can explain and back up.

It is also essential to help give clients a good sense of how they “come across.” Do they seem sincere or cocky? Agreeable or antagonistic?

Interview Questions

In addition to factual questions, interviewees should be prepared to answer “character” questions (questions requiring self disclosure) and self-evaluating questions. It is important to prepare people for these questions if they are not used to or comfortable with self disclosure and self evaluation.

Attitude

Job interviewees also need to be sensitive to how they come across in terms of attitude. Often interviewees err to either being too submissive or coming across as being too cocky.

Feedback to potential interviewers — and perhaps even role-playing an interview — can be a very valuable aid in interviewing.

Interview Practices

Questions to Ask

Interviewees also need to learn how to ask good questions themselves. Employers like people who seem to know what they want or who seem to have the mental wherewithal to ask intelligent questions.

Reasons for Leaving

It is also important for potential employees to have a good answer to the question: Why did you leave your last job?

NOTE: All of the issues and areas on this page are covered in more detail in the Appendix. The Appendix also contains a list of typical interview questions.

4 Keeping a Job

Getting a job is one thing, keeping it is another — and keeping it is mainly a matter of common sense.

On the following two pages are two sheets used by one of the NET agencies in Minneapolis. Of all the items listed, two (one on each sheet) can be considered the most important in the sense that employers have identified these two as the biggest issues on the job.

Actually the items are two sides of the same coin.

#11 on the “*Job Keeping Skills*” sheet says:

“Be sociable (maintain good relations with co-workers).”

#12 on the “*Knock Out Factors*” sheet states (as a “knock out” factor)

“Doesn’t get along with people.”

Maintaining a cooperative and harmonious relationship with co-workers is an extremely important thing to communicate to prospective job seekers, because when there is “bad blood” in a work setting — when there is strife, *everything* suffers. Work, productivity and morale go down hill.

Depending on the work and life experiences of your clients, there may be a need to sensitize them to the factors and issues on these two lists.

Job Keeping Skills

1. Use your best communication skills (people skills).
2. Be on time.
3. Be serious and ready to work.
4. Companies want people who are not sick (need to be at work).
5. Be a problem solver.
6. Be punctual.
7. Be honest (no stealing).
8. Learn company rules quickly.
9. Have good grooming and dress.
10. Have a positive attitude.
11. Be sociable (maintain good relationships with co-workers).
12. Keep eyes and ears open.
13. Ask questions (don't make costly mistakes).
14. Don't suggest changes too soon.
15. Be wary of grapevines.
16. Avoid gossip.
17. Reduce personal phone calls (your boss or company is paying).
18. Learn the chain of command.
19. Be able to work overtime if necessary.
20. Eliminate negative references (don't burn bridges).
21. Keep notes on what you've done.
22. Be able to follow instructions.
23. Know that the supervisor has the final word.
24. Leave personal problems at home.
25. Talk over work problems with an outside source (i.e., counselor, minister, etc.).
26. Do the job you were hired for to the best of your ability.

Knock Out Factors

When interviewers turn down applicants, these are the reasons that they give:

1. Poor appearance
2. Bad attitude (a know-it-all type)
3. Poor communication skills (voice, grammar, or pronunciation)
4. No job planning (doesn't know why they want the job)
5. No enthusiasm or energy

6. No confidence in themselves
7. Only look for money
8. Not willing to start at the bottom
9. Won't talk about problems (makes excuses)
10. Bad manners

11. Talks negatively about past employers
12. Doesn't get along with people
13. Doesn't want to learn
14. Bad eye contact
15. Bad handshake

16. Not sure what job they want
17. Bad family situation
18. Not able to make decisions
19. No interest in the company
20. Lazy

21. Prejudiced or extreme ideas
22. Can't take criticism
23. Late to interview
24. Doesn't thank interviewer
25. Tries to use pressure

26. No sense of humor
27. Doesn't answer questions ("talks around" them)

Keep this list in mind when you plan how you will answer interview questions and when you are in the interview. Remember that employers find number 12, "Doesn't get along with people," to be their biggest problem on the job.

5 Self Esteem

When telling a prospective job seeker all the do's and don'ts of interviewing, working and relations to others, it's easy to send the following messages:

- Change your personality
- You haven't got what it takes
- You need to be fixed
- Don't screw it up

No wonder many job seekers give up before they start. Some experience the "fear of trying" or even the "fear of success" syndrome. Their life experiences have been such that they expect to fail — expect to *not* get a job; expect to be rejected.

So they don't even try. Better not to try, they tell themselves, than to be put down or disrespected again.

In response to the task of getting a job, these are some basic human responses.

Confusion — Being willing, but not able to immediately put all the details in the right order. This reaction often leads to becoming overwhelmed.

Fear — Experiencing a fear of failure; an unwillingness to risk and lose. This reaction often results in a person being cool, distant and standoffish.

Anger — Reacts to the task with anger, arrogance or a sense that the world owes this, so I'm going to do it my way, and if they don't like it, that's tough! This reaction results in a person being antagonistic or hostile.

Confidence — A willingness to learn and forge ahead; to heed advice and seek out feedback. This reaction results in a person being seen as open and willing.

With people who are confident, you can pretty much show them what to do — and let them go. Check up on them occasionally, but for the most part, they'll come to you with questions and problems.

With the other reactions, however, different and more involved approaches are necessary.

6 Strategies For Support

Confusion

Confused people are generally willing, but a little overwhelmed by the process as a whole. With these people:

- Slow Down.
- Ask them questions to nail down what they do not understand.
- Take them through the parts that are unclear in a step-by-step manner.
- Make sure they can demonstrate that they understand each step.
- Help them make lists and other aids.
- Set up a means to communicate as the process moves along.

Basically the theme for support with these confused people is slow down and **TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME.**

Fear

People who fear the process need first of all to **explain** their feelings. **Why** do they feel the way they do? Once they express their feelings and experiences, they feel better, and you have a better idea of what areas to focus on. Also, after explaining their own feelings, they often have a better sense of how to proceed. With these people:

- First listen.
- Identify key areas of fear or bad past experiences.
- Give them solid help in these areas. Let them practice if possible and gain mastery.
- Assure them that because they have identified and practiced in a troublesome area, their chances for success are greatly increased.
- Follow up.

The theme for supporting these people is **LISTEN** and **ASSURE.**

Strategies For Support

Angry

Angry people have a “chip on their shoulder” — an **attitude**. This attitude is one of the most deadly for job seekers. It will label them as trouble makers. You need to confront this behavior right away. Let them know that it will do them in very quickly.

Often this anger is a front for fear. But whatever the cause, some basic principles apply.

- Let them vent; let them get it out.
- Identify the situations and experiences that made them mad.
- Let them vent again if necessary. It needs to be completely flushed out before you can help them.
- Summarize until they say “Yeah, you understand me.”
- Ask them, “How’s it working out for you?” In other words, has your anger been helping you or hurting you? Generally they will say, “Hurting me.” They may even laugh at this point.
- Let them know you understand and that they have a right to be mad.
- Let them know also that the behavior of anger, arrogance and being “in your face” will **not** help them in the long run.
- Identify the areas they feel the most vulnerable in.
- Give them the information and support they need to bolster themselves in these areas
- Help them make a plan and stress that they need to follow the plan and not lose their tempers.
- Check back with them and, if possible, support their progress.

Overall, making a simple distinction between confused, fearful, angry and confident people will give you a way to approach them.

Strategies For Support

In this process you will validate their feelings — you will let them know that their feelings are valid and normal. You will also let them know that their feelings — however valid — are also not helping them.

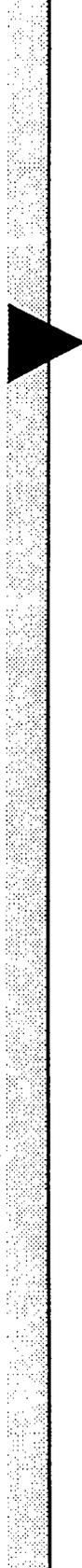
Then you can begin to identify the areas in which they need support, and get them the information, skills and practice to fill those areas.

Finally, reassure them that they are going to succeed by following the process.

Strategy Revisited

In summary, the general areas you need to focus on are:

- 1** **Employers' Expectations.** Talking to, and to the extent possible, shaping the expectations of potential employers. Helping them understand the needs of the applicants.
- 2** **Resume Writing.** Helping potential applicants write effective resumes that look professional and "businesslike."
- 3** **Interview Practices.** Preparing potential applicants for interviews and interaction with employers. (The Appendix contains more detail in this area.)
- 4** **Keeping a Job.** Focusing on the attributes that can potentially knock someone out of a job — particularly the ability to maintain good and harmonious working relationships with fellow workers.
- 5** **Self Esteem.** Helping people establish and maintain a sense of themselves and their self esteem when operating in the new work environment.
- 6** **Support Strategies.** Helping people establish and maintain a sense of themselves and their self esteem when operating in the new work environment.



Section Five

**The Role of
Transit**

“This Program is Relationships”

Surveying the scope of people and agencies involved in a project like the Reverse Commute Program, it would seem that the role of transit is the clearest — the most cut and dried.

“It’s a numbers game,” one person said. “If they can get the riders, we’ll roll a bus.”

Unfortunately — or perhaps fortunately — it isn’t that simple. True, there are certain minimum numbers of riders needed to sustain certain bus routes. But to look at Transit’s role in the overall process as simply the carrier between point A and point B underestimates the motives of the people in transit companies and authorities, and overlooks the need for cooperation and flexibility.

To get a better look at Transit’s role in all of this, we need to step back a little and ask the question:

How is the success of a Reverse Commute Program measured?

From the transit organization’s point of view, the answer may seem simple: Is it profitable? Can we break even?

This is a one dimensional point of view. A broader view was expressed as follows:

“Remember, this is not a money maker. This is a social service.”

Social service? More Welfare?

The person making the statement — an employee of a suburban transit authority — was expressing the broad view that even if the program loses money, what is its effect on welfare, business growth, suburban development, numbers of people trained, housing quality — even motivation, mobility and self esteem?

When considering the savings and benefits that can be gained from creating employment — both socially as well as financially — the criteria for measuring “success” are greatly expanded. Although not immediate, the long-term benefits can include improvements in housing, education, lower crime, opportunities and general life style.

This is not to say that we must ignore the day-to-day realities of paying for transportation, but it does say that we need to see the role of transit in a larger context.

Reverse Commuting—The Horseless Carriage

Before there was a car, there was a horseless carriage. Before there was radio, there was a wireless. In times of transition, the “new” often is described — initially — in terms of the past with words “horseless” or “wireless.”

The title *Reverse Commute* may just turn out to be such a term. We all understand “Commute,” so when it goes the other way, we reason it must be a “reverse commute.”

So, what does that mean? What’s the transition?

It is hard to say exactly, but one thing seems clear, namely that our metropolitan areas are transferring from an urban orientation to a mixed urban and suburban job orientation.

As a result, the mass transit systems that were designed to serve the older — urban job orientation — system will become increasingly less able to meet the transportation needs of the evolving urban-suburban demographics.

Add to that such things as established routes, lack of flexibility, franchises on certain routes, unions, inter community competition etc., and you have the makings of a behemoth that will resist the very simple fact that — regarding transportation — things need to change.

The Reverse Commute programs across the country may well be the vanguard not only of transportation, but of thinking about the relationship of the terms urban and suburban.

In any case, these programs are blazing the way not only to create jobs, but to merge cultures. And as trailblazers, they are likely to generate a great deal of energy, both for and against.

In the Twin Cities area, the reverse commute program developed as a result of one step of many on an evolutionary path. It began with one suburban employer looking for workers in the inner city. That firm enlisted the help of an inner city Job Bank and some initial placements were made.

Transportation was initially handled via cabs and vans. The inner city Job Bank realized that other nearby suburban businesses had opportunities for their clients and more hiring occurred. Now there was enough activity and building credibility for the businesses and Job Banks to call on the Public Transit agency for support. This interaction, plus a variety of other activities described earlier, resulted in initial ventures to fill specific needs. Then as the needs grew, the transit agency could grow with them. It started small and increased with need.

Flexibility is the Key

Given the fact that the transit systems may be the antenna for an emerging network of cross metro commuting, it is necessary that they be flexible above all else.

Often, established city bus systems have difficulty being flexible. Not only do they have long standing established lines, but there are also things such as union regulations, cost factors and turf issues that prevent them from being able to or wanting to make an effort to change.

As a result, the smaller transit companies and authorities are often in the position to bend to meet the emerging needs.

When a person, for example, gets a job through the community employment agency, this person would call the transit authority and find out how to get from the inner city to the suburb. This leg of the journey would typically be scheduled and clear.

But this is only the first leg of the journey. The first bus probably will not take the person directly to the job location. This is where a "hub and spoke" system kicks in.

One transit authority in the Twin Cities area has established as their objective simply to get people to work. This commitment has resulted in a "reverse ride" program where people can call for a ride to work or school or elsewhere.

The person must make an arrangement — a "reservation" for a bus or van — to pick him or her up at the end of the bus route and from there travel to the job site.

Whereas the first leg of the journey is fixed and scheduled, the second demand-response leg must be flexible.

All of which begs the question of cost/benefits. Is it practical? Do we use vans, buses, cars? In short, it calls for a very flexible and committed response as the authority creates routes in response to needs.

Over time certain patterns arise, so that in practice this authority has a combination of fixed and flexible routes.

These they are able to dovetail into the Reverse Commute program more easily simply because of their willingness to go where people are.

Flexibility is the Key

In response to this flexibility, businesses are more willing to alter their shifts and community service agencies are more willing to provide training in targeted areas to meet the business needs.

Only when all the players are willing to change and make allowances, will a Reverse Commute program be able to get off the ground.

Current Services

Services currently provided by the Suburban Transit Authority:

1. Express and Direct Routes

These are traditional suburb to city commuter routes, which provide return to city service for reverse commuters working the night shift.

2. Reserve-A-Ride Service

These routes provide city to suburb service in two legs. First an express bus picks up riders in the city and drops them at a suburban transit hub. Riders then transfer to a dial-a-ride shuttle bus which delivers riders directly to their respective places of employment.

3. Connections at Regional Transit Hubs

These routes provide connections to other transit providers for riders who can't connect directly to the reserve-a-ride reverse commute service due to location or schedule problems.

See sample schedules in the Appendix.

Issues

Some of the issues you may have to address when setting up the transit arm of a Reverse Commute program are:

Attitudes

What are the attitudes of people in communities regarding transporting people from the inner city to jobs in the suburbs?

Obviously these attitudes can run the gamut from acceptance to hostile reaction.

The point is that before attempting such a program, you need to get a “read” on the community attitudes, and then — if they are negative — take steps to deal with them.

Need For Community Commitment

Once you get a feel for the acceptance level of your community, the next step is to build community commitment.

The economic argument — we need workers; let’s bus some in — isn’t enough. People agree in principle that businesses need to fill jobs, but commitment goes beyond that.

It requires a program to educate and establish that the program is a good thing for both of the communities — of the “cultures” — involved.

Planned Obsolescence

Since the goal of this program is to create employment and a better standard of living, the goal of this program (in terms of transportation) would be to enable the person to buy a car — which would mean they would no longer need a bus.

Thus, the program will always be needing to change and adjust to varying needs of ridership.

Issues, continued

In addition to these broader issues, there are several specific areas that also need to be addressed:

1

Break-Even Points

Although there must be a certain willingness to prime the pump to establish and sustain a Reverse Commute program, there are also some basic economic realities to be dealt with.

Define your break-even points explicitly and clearly, so you have a good idea exactly what you need when you are dealing with the businesses and the community service agencies. The better the information you have, the more likely you will be able to work out mutually acceptable solutions.

2

Be Prepared for “Drops”

The patterns of business and employment are such that there tend to be peaks and valleys in employment — and therefore in ridership. Some work is seasonal. Some companies will have a sudden “push” that will end just as suddenly. Moreover, businesses get sold, close down and move.

3

Be Prepared for Political Obstacles

Specifically, in many areas, there is still a sense that the core city needs to be rejuvenated at all costs. Thus, political pressure is often brought to bear on the suburbs to contribute money and resources to the rejuvenation of the city.

This mentality is based on the older idea that business is still centered in the city, and that suburbs are only “bedroom communities.” However wrong or changing these ideas may be, there is never the less still a lot of influence being exerted in this regard.

4

Help People “Know The Drill”

One of the most common reasons why people do not or cannot avail themselves fully of your services is because they don't know or aren't sure how the system works. This is especially true for the demand-response portion of the trip. Common questions include:

Issues, continued

- Where do you stop?
- When do you stop?
- How do I get to _____?
- What's the best way to get from _____?
- How do I make a reservation?
- What happens if _____?
- Is it possible to _____?

With flexibility, constantly changing (i.e., adjusting) schedules and routes, this knowledge problem is only compounded.

Adding further to the problem is the fact that people — particularly those outside your community; i.e., in the inner city — simply don't know what they don't know. And if that weren't enough, a final problem is that people often don't even want to ask questions for fear of looking stupid, or fear of being discounted or disappointed.

Therefore it is essential to help people "Know the Drill" — that is know exactly what you offer and how best to avail themselves of what you offer.

Particularly at the beginning of the process, and working closely with the business and community service agencies, develop simple and clear guidelines as to what you offer and how it works.

Also, personnel in your office or agency must be trained to deal effectively and empathetically with people who have questions or want information.

Again, this primary difference is a cultural one. What you assume that all your customers know to be "common knowledge," you find they don't.

Strategy Revisited

In summary, the general areas you need to focus on are:

- 1** **Context.** Looking at the job of transit in terms of a larger social context.
- 2** **Flexibility.** A willingness to look at options and get creative when mapping out transit routes and timetables.
- 3** **Community Attitudes and Commitment.** Willingness to deal with the social attitudes regarding transporting inner-city people into the suburbs.
- 4** **Economic Realities.** Realizing that even though the program is funded and supported by government, there are economic realities that cannot be forgotten.
- 5** **Economic Viability.** Also realizing that these routes can become profitable and economically viable.
- 6** **Political Obstacles.** Expect resistance from forces that still consider the rejuvenation of the inner city to be of primary importance.
- 7** **Education.** Recognize that enabling people to know and be comfortable with the program — “how it works” — is a key factor in getting people to actually use it.



Critical Success Factors

Tipping the Balance

A project such as Reverse Commuting is nothing else if not “iffy.” Nothing happens by itself; everything depends on everything else. As we have hopefully pointed out, such an undertaking requires cooperation and collaboration with a vengeance.

As a result, it is important to focus on key areas — what we call Critical Success Factors. Critical Success Factors are those elements which are instrumental to such a project even having a *chance*.

In this final section, we want to describe what we have found to be the Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for our project:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| CSF #1 | A “Champion” |
| CSF #2 | Political Power |
| CSF #3 | A Permanent Coordinator |
| CSF #4 | Conflict Management |
| CSF #5 | Focus on Interests, Not Positions |
| CSF #6 | Diversity |
| CSF #7 | Selection |

I A “Champion”

A “Champion” is simply a person who has the energy and abilities to both pull things and people together and sustain energy and commitment over the long haul.

A champion is someone who operates from a core of strong belief; nothing short of that will enable this person to weather the ups and downs of the project’s evolution.

But more than just energy and belief — essential as they are — a champion also needs to have a realistic no-nonsense approach to the realities of the project.

The typical profile for an effective champion is:

- *Promoter* — Has skills in the area of promotion and marketing. Ideally, this person’s actual profession — whether in private business or politics or education — should include a good measure of work in the area of advocacy.
- *Rallying Point* — This person needs to be visible and available — accessible to any and all who need advice or support. Such a task can place a large responsibility on this person both in terms of time and energy.
- *Political Connections* — Also helpful, if not essential, is someone who has at least some experience with, and sense of, politics. Since much of the success for the project will depend on political connections, having experience in the skills and intuitions of this process is essential.
- *Campaign Manager* — Finally, the champion is also well served by basic managerial/organizational skills. He or she may not actually do all the detail work, but must at least be able to coordinate and direct it.

In short, a champion is characterized by the words Energy, Source, Power, Influence, Dignity and Self Reliance.

A tall order?

Absolutely — but essential for success.

2 Political Power

Political power — in the best sense of the word — is the constructive power that comes from *inside* political structures. A “champion” can put pressure on the powers that be, and work with them, but the actual decisions and opportunities ultimately come from *within* the system.

In short, you need a person with actual power over a functional area of government or administration. Typically, these people would include such people as:

- State or National Representatives or Senators
- City Council Members
- County Board Members
- Mayors
- Directors of City, State or County Programs
- Federal Agency Heads.

Particularly, you need people with influence in the areas of transportation, social services, human services and employment.

As we have pointed out in the government section, the most likely source of influence is at the county level. But at whatever level you operate, you need to be able to exert influence over:

- *Funding* — To pay for the program.
- *Other Politicians* — To support and expand the project.
- *Authority* — To open new routes, set new policy, etc.
- *Bounds* — To alter existing “turf” — whatever it might be — to support program

Most likely the political power will result from different people and areas teaming up to meet both their needs.

Political Power

Probably the most effective strategy is as follows:

- *County* — Build successes at the county level. Since the county can encompass several municipalities, it's the logical place to start.
- *State* — Take the county successes to the state for added funding and support, and hopefully, the ability to take it into new counties.
- *National* — Once established, you can then look to the FTA and Labor Departments for added strength and support.

The key idea here is:

Build Credibility As You Go.

And the overall theme in the political area is:

Build A Strategy.

Develop a plan to start and grow the program with political support at every level.

3 | A Permanent Coordinator

Absolutely essential to the success of a project like this, which depends on the close coordination, cooperation and communication of different people and organizations, is a coordinator — a permanent liaison person to keep the parts from flying apart.

This is not the kind of job you can divvy up. Volunteers won't make it happen. You need one person. If the position does not exist, you need to create it.

The responsibilities — and therefore the basic skills needed for this position — include primarily:

- *Details* — Handling and overseeing the details of the ongoing effort.
- *Media* — This person is responsible for representing the program to the media. Thus some skills in basic media relations is helpful.
- *Information Clearing House* — This person is the repository for all information about the project. He or she acts, then, as a library and a newspaper.
- *Budget* — Basic responsibilities for budget and disbursement of funds.
- *Screen and Hire Vendors* — Finding and hiring vendors of services and products e.g., printing, media relations, video, publications, etc.
- *Schedule* — This person creates and drives the project timelines.
- *Writing* — May in some cases do actual writing and communications.
- *Liaison* — Moves between participants in the program; good communication and people skills.
- *"Selling" the Program* — Advocacy skills in promoting the program.
- *Presentations* — Stand-up speaking and presenting skills to educate and inform community groups.
- *Filter* — The person who can be a gate keeper and interpreter for people and information. In order to keep peace, head off misunderstandings and make sure that information is accurate and complete and in general, engage in "spin control." The "filter" function is essential.

In short, this position is responsible for *Detail, Promotion and Filtering*.

4 Conflict Management

An enterprise such as this one is subject to ups and downs. As a result, the people too are subject to ups and downs in mood, motivation and attitude.

It's one thing to espouse cooperation and tell ourselves to be "flexible," but it's quite another to actually practice those things.

As a result, it is essential to *develop the skills and avail yourself of the resources* to deal with testy issues. In short, take active steps to hone your coping skills. Maybe you can do this yourself. Maybe — and this is advisable — you can find a neutral third party or counselor to help mediate problems, stresses and issues when they arise.

The types of issues you will likely run into include:

- *Differences of Opinion* — over direction, application and a host of other items.
- *Conflicts* — both interpersonal and inter-organizational; disagreements as to turf, influence and responsibility.
- *Scarce Resources* — the lack of funds or shifting of elusive funding sources.
- *Self Doubt* — the tendency to be leveled down by setbacks, difficulty or speed.
- *People Taking Credit* — that is, people wanting perhaps to take credit for work not wholly their own.
- *Participants That Let You Down* — when the people you are helping either don't show, quit or in general become ungrateful, obstructionist or complain.
- *Business's Back Out* — When organizations show interest, or promise to participate, and then for whatever reason back out.
- *Conflict of Interest* — when different people's or organization's interests conflict and need to be mediated.

As you can see, there is no shortage of potential stressors in this undertaking.

Self management, Coping and Conflict Resolution skills are not "nice-to-have" — they are essential to success.

5 Focus on Interests, Not Positions

Although this may seem obvious, it can tend to get in the way if you are not careful. As the project progresses, people's ideas grow and become more defined. Then at some point they become solid — and we run the risk of becoming married to them just because they are “ours.”

A distinction between Interests and Positions is useful here.

- *Interest* — An idea or approach that seems to satisfy the needs of our vision or direction. Interests are flexible, open to change and always measurable by how much they support our overall goal.
- *Position* — An idea that is solid and to which I am wed. We defend positions. They resist change and tinkering, and at some point don't care that much about the overall direction.

Where is the line between interests and positions? Well, it's hard to say. But we can step over the line sometimes without ever knowing it.

So, in order to preserve the win-win nature of the project as a whole, we have to be sensitive to our tendency to — defend and advocate “our” points of view regardless of the overall direction of the project.

6 Diversity

One of the goals of this project is of course achieving diversity both in the workplace and in the community.

We have to recognize, however, that the idea of diversity is a double bladed sword. It can cut for us or against us.

Organizations, governments, municipal projects and many people consider diversity a positive force, a goal, an ideal and a worthy cause. To be against diversity would reflect poorly on anybody who did it — not to mention, it is also illegal in some cases.

There is a strong undercurrent, however, that is opposed to diversity — sees it as threatening, troublesome, undesirable and unnatural. These attitudes often go unexpressed. Or they are cloaked in reasonable arguments concerning efficiency, costs, skill levels, community harmony and logistics. As a result it is not unusual to find people supporting the idea with their mouth, but sandbagging it with their actions — or lack of action.

Although this duality in response is obvious to many, it will almost certainly be a factor in a program such as the Reverse Commute.

Be prepared to deal with it.

7 Selection

Since this project will involve some rather large ups and downs, and since some of the participants may see their involvement, as one person put it, as “another job I don’t get paid for,” selection is an extremely important factor.

Some of the key aspects you are looking for in people you select are:

- *Personal Commitment* — A felt sense of intrinsic commitment to the goal. Look for past involvement in similar projects.
- *Willingness To Work* — Look for signs of devotion to work hard and a history of hard work. Talk to their references.
- *Flexibility* — Highly structured and control oriented people may not like this kind of work. Also don’t confuse “being organized” with “control oriented.” One is a skill, the other is a mental attitude.
- *Problem Solver* — Look for evidence of and a history of going against the grain and a tendency to be persistent.

The best way to insure that you get the right people is to establish a fairly rigorous screening process — with good interview questions and different people to do the interviewing.

Other suggestions include:

- *Don’t Oversell Or Overpromise* — Let people know just what they’re in for. If anything, over emphasize the difficulties a little.
- *Be Realistic* — Regarding participants and potential employers, point out just exactly what they can and cannot expect. Point out the “pump priming” that may have to occur — i.e., added training, salaries, complication with transportation.

In short, establish clear expectations on all ends — participants, employers, contributors and staff.

Good Luck — Despite the work and difficulties, it’s a worthwhile undertaking.

