

National Marketing Initiative on Supported Employment

1. Develop a Mission Statement

Developing a mission statement is one of the first steps in generating a marketing plan. It helps an organization establish an identity and purpose. Supported employment agencies need to review their mission or create one if none exists.

The mission statement addresses how the organization intends to facilitate community inclusion and employment of people with severe disabilities. Included in a mission statement are the organizational values and philosophy. There should be a visionary theme to a mission. Those who write and are guided by it achieve ownership of a value or service. Mission statements are strong when they are clear and brief.

2. Complete an Environmental Analysis

a. Identify Stakeholders: Stakeholders are those individuals and organizations who have an interest in achieving the mission statement. They need to believe in the mission and have a commitment in achieving its objectives. Stakeholders must understand the philosophy and concepts associated with supported employment in order to be effective players in a marketing plan.

Each organization needs to generate its own list of stakeholders. Some possible stakeholders in a national supported employment marketing plan are:

Supported Employment Stakeholders: Persons with disabilities and families
Parent Networks
Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE)
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment (RRTC)
State Vocational Rehabilitation Offices State Agencies (e.g., Dept. of Mental Health and Mental Retardation)
Client Assistance Program in each state Local, state, and federal legislators
President' s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
Representatives from the Executive Branch Employers and Business Organizations
Self-Advocacy Groups (e.g., People First, National Alliance of the Mentally III)
Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (Association for Retarded Citizens, United Cerebral Palsy Association, etc.)

b. Conduct an Environmental Analysis: Each organization, as part of a market planning, conducts an environmental analysis. This activity analyzes the current status of supported employment. One environmental analysis activity is a needs assessment. A needs assessment yields information such as numbers of people needing supported employment services, types of service options, quality indicators, and other demographic information.

c. Another strategy is to conduct a SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats): This analysis provides information on how to design services. During this step, all the information gathered through the internal and external assessments and consumer research is integrated and reorganized. Strengths and weaknesses are internal characteristics of the organization. Opportunities are positive actions that can be taken. Threats tend to be external factors that affect the organization. A marketing plan should be designed to maximize the strengths and opportunities while eliminating or reducing weaknesses and threats.

Strengths: Identify the local strengths of supported employment services, for example:

1. There are positive people and/or organizations that are driving supported employment.
2. Adequate resources are available.
3. Supported employment policy has been developed and implemented.
4. Public relations activities are successful.

Weaknesses: Identify the problems that restrict supported employment growth, for example:

1. There are limited numbers of quality providers available.
2. Supported employment has a negative image in the community.
3. Consumers and family members are unaware of employment choices. Weak links exist between the school systems and adult services for transition planning.
4. Limited money/resources are available for supported employment services.

Opportunities: Identify the positive actions that promote supported employment, for example:

1. Opportunities exist in the community for employment.
2. Values are changing which promote choice making by people with disabilities.
3. Employers are seeking assistance with Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.
4. Implementation of vouchers could create more demand for supported employment services.
5. School systems are becoming more aware of the need to create linkages with adult services.

Threats: Identify the threats to supported employment implementation, for example:

1. Segregated facilities have considerable legislative support.
2. Dollars continually go to segregated programs.
3. Employment for individuals with disabilities has a negative media

image.

4. Congress has a limited understanding of disability issues.
5. Many service providers are unaware of the abilities of individuals who they serve.

3. Identify Marketing Strategies

Once this information is obtained, an organization begins developing specific marketing strategies with the following four "P's" in mind. These are product, place, price, and promotion.

Product/Service: Remember that product is made up of tangible properties, benefits, and packaging, as well as the services that surround the product, supported employment. The primary product in supported employment is labor, and therefore employment for people with disabilities is our product. Services are those provided by staff such as screening of applicants, recruitment, job analysis, assistance with job accommodation, on the job training, ADA consultation, and so forth.

Place: "Location, location, location!" Businesses have to be in locations that are accessible to their customers, people with disabilities and employers. For instance, if your agency is located in the central business district, it will be perceived as part of the business community. Demographic changes in a community may necessitate an organizational move or expansion to accommodate the customers.

Price: A common myth is that supported employment is free. It is not, since taxpayers are funding this service through the Department of Rehabilitation. If employers had to pay, there would be substantial costs, and therefore there is a monetary value to supported employment. Employers, if they value a service, will pay for it. This may be something that should be considered in a marketing plan.

Promotion: These are a variety of activities that positively portray an organization's products and services. The scope of these will depend on the organization's financial resources. Generally, supported employment promotion includes brochures, flyers, business cards, videos, public service announcements, speeches before service clubs and organizations, TV or radio clips, and newspaper articles. There should be a well developed plan prior to promotional activities, and the plan should correspond to the needs of the employment community. Promotions targeted to specific audiences will be the most effective.

4. Develop Marketing Goals & Objectives

When first implementing the steps described, an organization may want to use a marketing planning checklist. Using a checklist will ensure that all steps in the marketing process are completed within realistic time lines and that responsible individuals are identified.

Often, organizations make the mistake of ending the marketing process after the structured activities described on these two pages are completed. However, marketing information should be collected on an ongoing basis. All of this valuable information will be lost unless there is a specific plan developed for implementation.

After an agency has identified in its mission that it wants to be a market-based, customer-driven company, specific goals and specific objectives should be identified. These goals and objectives must be observable, measurable, and obtainable. Sample goals with objectives for a supported employment marketing plan follow:

Goal #1: Increase employer participation in Employment Opportunities, Inc.

Sample Objectives:

- By 3/1 a twelve person business advisory council will be established.
- By 7/1 Employment Opportunities, Inc. will have organizational memberships in the Chamber of Commerce, Retail Merchant's Association, and Rockville Human Resources Council.
- By 10/1 the first employer of the year award will be presented by Employment Opportunities.

Goal #2: Hire and train staff to implement the marketing plan.

Sample Objectives:

- By 2/1 Employment Opportunities will hire one marketing specialist.
- By 3/15 the marketing specialist will conduct a training on working in a customer-driven organization.
- By 4/1 the marketing specialist will have a strategy to assess the effectiveness of the marketing activities.

Goal #3: Develop products to improve the image of Employment Opportunities, Inc.

Sample Objectives:

- By 4/30 a marketing brochure will be produced with assistance from the business advisory council.
- By 6/30 six public service announcements (PSA) will be aired on the radio advertising the services available from Employment Opportunities, Inc.
- By 10/15 the executive director and several customers will appear on a local cable TV show to discuss employment opportunities in the community.

5. Implementing Marketing Plan

Once the organization has developed a mission statement, identified stakeholders, and conducted an environmental analysis (e.g., SWOT analysis, product, price, promotion, place), it needs to decide how to implement the suggestions and recommendations made through these activities. Specifically, the organization must commit to implementing a marketing plan. The board of directors and the executive director must dedicate resources (e.g., money, staff, and time) to engage in marketing activities. In addition, the executive director must identify a person responsible for the plan, and there should be a line item in the agency's budget to carry out the activities

6. Evaluate the Marketing Plan

In order to determine the effectiveness of a marketing plan, ongoing evaluation is critical. The formal plan should be evaluated quarterly with revisions made if necessary. Plans should be flexible; if an objective is not met, an organization and staff can determine the reason based on this ongoing evaluation. Evaluation can include the following:

1. customer satisfaction surveys (consumers, employers, staff, funding agencies, family members, etc.)
2. personal interviews
3. telephone calls
4. observation
5. review of records (e.g., minutes from the advisory council, numbers of new employer contacts made, telephone logs, number and type of placements, etc.)
6. assessment of permanent products
7. staff performance

Developing and implementing a marketing plan is an ongoing process. The formal "paper" plan should be reviewed and revised annually. As part of the ongoing process, an organization evaluates the effectiveness of the marketing plan which is measured in quality employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Quality indicators include increased wages, career ladder positions, a variety of job choices, and increased numbers of individuals working with the most severe disabilities. Secondary outcomes include increased familiarity with the business community, enhanced organizational image, and improved customer satisfaction. All the information gathered during a year are used as input for the next year's marketing plan.