

Basic Transitional Jobs Program Design

Transitional Jobs (TJ) is a practical workforce strategy that uses *time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services*, to transition participants rapidly and successfully in the labor market. The essential underpinning of the program is that every participant can be successful in the workplace. TJ programs reflect a flexible, evolving design comprised of core fundamental elements combined with elements tailored to the target population. Transitional Jobs programs can vary as to length, the type of transitional employer (for profit, nonprofit, or government), the role of formal skills training, funding streams, and the population served. TJ can be delivered in an urban or rural context of a micro-enterprise, a publicly or privately funded job, or work crews bidding on jobs. In any of these settings, the following are key common elements.

Objectives:

Transitional Jobs offers a model of employment by which participants learn through experience the customs and routines of work, acquire work-task skills, establish an employment record, and generate employer references to enhance their competitiveness in private sector employment. Transitional Jobs programs assume that everyone can work. With confidence gained from success in the workplace and appropriate case management to assist with any problems along the way, TJ provides the participant with learning opportunities, pay, and the support necessary to transition to full-time, permanent employment.

Target Populations:

The populations served are typically limited to people with multiple employment obstacles or limited work experience. This includes individuals who are homeless, persons with criminal records, refugees and asylum seekers, long-term welfare recipients, and youth. For each of these populations, the Transitional Jobs program employs strength-based case management to help participants manage their barriers and be successful in the workplace. Program services are tailored for the specific population and strong linkages are made to related support services.

Orientation and Assessment:

Program services begin with program overview, initial screening, and often drug testing, followed by a review of program requirements. Participants are assessed in the areas of academic skills, vocational skill development, employment experience, and vocational goals and interests. The assessment informs the development of both short-term employment goals and long-range career plans. This process engages the individual in the program and in “owning” and developing an individual service plan. This plan will then be the focal point for the participant and staff throughout the program.

Drug testing in Transitional Jobs programs is not for the purpose of excluding participants but to expose them to the practices of many employers, to identify use and connect participants to services, if needed, and to keep them engaged in moving to employment through a Transitional Job while they are in treatment.

Life Skills and Job Readiness:

Because TJ is an experiential learning model, life skill classes and activities focus on skills needed to succeed in the transitional job as well as resolving challenges at work. Challenges can include childcare, medical or drug treatment, parole or probation, other appointments, family problems, housing, and child support. These short-term, peer-to-peer classes address soft job skills, family support issues, and personal barriers. For most populations, but especially for persons with criminal records, classes should address anger management, stress reduction, conflict resolution, and other life skills to support the work of the case managers.

Additionally, classes may include writing a resume, filling out an employment application, how to interview and conduct a job search, learning real wage expectations, learning how to dress on the job, displaying appropriate workplace behaviors, developing financial literacy, and engaging in career planning. Developing skills needed to retain employment starts with these classes and continues throughout participation in the Transitional Jobs program.

Case Management:

Case management in TJ programs differs from case management in many settings because it is work focused. The case management function is designed as an ongoing activity that monitors progress toward short-term goals, maintains contact, supports meaningful engagement, and fosters progress toward unsubsidized employment as a key long-term goal related to a career plan. Resolution of underlying barriers to participation is discussed and addressed including transportation problems, lack of affordable housing, decision-making skills, and goal setting.

Case management also includes:

- ongoing employment counseling during job readiness training, employability planning, and the Transitional Job assignment;
- evaluation and review of weekly performance on the job;
- weekly planning to improve workplace success through greater management of personal barriers and skill attainment;
- monitoring of participation in job search and interviewing with job leads; and
- linkage to other supports to gain unsubsidized employment while in a transitional job.

Transitional Job:

The subsidized job is a short-term, wage-paying employment opportunity located with employers who have agreed to assign a mentor on the job (typically trained by the agency operating the Transitional Jobs program) who will also be the person reporting to the case manager on work performance and any workplace issues. Employers typically are nonprofits, but can be governmental agencies or for-profit employers. Especially for private employers acting as Transitional Jobs employers, they are expected to contribute to the wages, employ the participant, or actively assist with placement activities.

The purpose of the subsidized job is to help the participant obtain a work history, to reinforce the participant's sense of ability and stability on the job, and to increase the participant's job skills.

Transitional jobs are between 20 and 35 hours per week with a wages averaging \$5.15 to \$8.00 per hour. Because participants are paid, they are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Social Security credit. The duration of the subsidized job varies by program, with the average length of the Transitional Job lasting two to six months. Participants often access unsubsidized placement before six months.

Career Pathways Planning:

Transitional Jobs programs continually develop basic employment skills, integrate education with work, and propel individuals toward progressively higher levels of skill, responsibility, and wages. Unlike traditional training programs targeted to a particular population or individual job, Transitional Jobs programs stress career advancement through employer participation while building on the idea of a universal program, with training and work opportunities open to individuals at all levels of skills and readiness in the local job market.

Unsubsidized Job Placement and Retention:

Transitional Jobs programs are a vehicle to finding a permanent job; this support makes the model unique and more successful than Workfare or Work First job referral models. While working on the transitional job, individuals work with job development staff in the search for unsubsidized employment. Based on assessed skill level, work experience, employment desires, and presence or lack of barriers, the job developer and case manager work with the participant in developing an individualized job strategy that incorporates other Transitional Job program work activities with the goal of securing unsubsidized employment at the best available wages. TJ programs typically offer job retention services for a minimum of 90 days. If the Transitional Job employer is for-profit, typically that employer will have agreed to hire the transitional employees after a period or to work to prepare them and support their applications with other employers.

Education and Training:

Linkages to education (ABE, ESL, GED, college) and vocational training are strongly encouraged. These skill enhancements help increase future employment and earnings potential. Whenever possible, resources for education should be leveraged to couple the skill or educational credential gain with growing self-confidence in the workplace to move the participant toward higher wage employment.

Additional Client Support:

Program funds are often used to provide assistance with transportation, clothing for work, tools for work, emergency food, and other emergency needs. For example, some programs provide participants with public transportation passes during orientation and throughout the Transitional Job phase. Others provide participants with a clothing stipend and with boots for work.

Incentives:

Incentives for program participants can serve as crucial program and job retention devices to encourage both mentors and participants to remain engaged with the program. These can be made available while the employee is in a Transitional Job or as incentives when milestones are reached in employment. Incentive options include gift certificates for mentors of TJ participants who enter unsubsidized employment and stay on the job for 90 days, certificates for participants who enter unsubsidized employment and attend retention sessions, peer recognition through newsletters, and continued participation with the program in an advisory capacity after employment. Some Transitional Jobs programs have also used gym memberships, aerobics classes, computer class certificates, other similar in-kind contributions, or discounted purchases from the private sector to reinforce the positives of workplace success. For many participants, being asked to return to participate in peer-to-peer sessions is also a personal incentive that can be incorporated in the program.

Conclusion:

Part of the enduring strength of the Transitional Jobs model is its flexibility and adaptability to a variety of populations and contexts. If you are interested in starting a Transitional Jobs program

in your community, please explore the resources available at www.transitionaljobs.net and complete the Request for Technical Assistance form on the NTJN website.

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of more than 200 Transitional Jobs (TJ) programs, policy organizations, and sponsoring organizations. TJ is a workforce strategy designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs and combining real work, skill development, and supportive services to transition participants successfully into the labor market. The Network works to influence a number of audiences to ensure that policies will account for the hard-to-employ, that the public understands the need to invest in these services, that programs are able to effectively serve as many individuals as possible, and that best practices and technical assistance are widely shared and implemented throughout the network. The NTJN is made possible through the generous support of The Joyce Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Network members.

The mission of the National Transitional Jobs Network is to support and expand the size, type, and number of Transitional Jobs programs nationwide and to support the quality of the service model.

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