

Attending: Ashley Bragger, Dawna Perez, Deborah Regan and guests Priscilla Chaves, Asst. Director HeadStart (HR Manager/Governance), Karen Nicholas, HR Manager at Opportunity Works, and by phone Sehin Mekuria –Deputy Commissioner/CFO for MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and Kimberly Bugeya, HR Advisor for Steward Holy Family Hospital.

Focus Group notes

We began by clarifying the system we are proposing and what exactly it will do to help local employers and community partners.

Question 1: How do you currently receive applications for open positions at your companies?

Kim: Their system is all online; applicants go to their specific site which is affiliated with Healthcare Source. They do not have any contracts with job boards.

Priscilla: They receive the majority of applications as hard copies. They also pay a fee to a national company for limited time viewing on local websites for local openings/candidates. For her and company, she feels that this system would be incredibly beneficial.

Sehin: There is a central place for all state agencies to post positions. Their HR division is online and applicants can go in to look for jobs by type and by agency. Online applications can be done to some extent; however, some agencies do not accept online applications. Occasionally, HR participates in job fairs, only when they actually need to hire someone.

Ashley: *Is it possible to post their jobs on our site and have it linked over to their company site still? This was mostly asked for Kim and Sehin who work for a hospital and the state.*

Both Kim and Sehin think this is possible to do.

Karen: noted that jobs are posted on the website and applicants can email their application or drop it off.

Question 2: Does your company use any filter tools to screen potential candidates?

Kim: The hospital does have an applicant tracking system and they can put in pre-screening questions (like NECC's "Core Requirements"). This system is designed to weed out inappropriate or unqualified applicants, who do not answer the questions the way she needs them too. It then tells the applicants that they are not qualified. She has not had to use this feature yet, but she has the capability.

Other participants were familiar with such programs or filters but did not use them.

Question 3: If NECC were to have this comprehensive web-hosted system, would you find it to be helpful when you are looking for volunteers, interns, and work study opportunities?

Karen: Yes she would, but she noted that in the past she would call NECC about potential opportunities and they would hold a paper job description for students, but she found that it would never go any further than that.

Ashley: noted that the college recognizes the need for a central location for employers to be able to go and post open opportunities with their companies. NECC is actively working to improve this.

Priscilla: Finds this system to be extremely beneficial for interns and volunteers at her organization. She commented that it is a quicker way to see potential candidates and to strengthen connections with local institutions. She thinks it will be particularly helpful for students who just graduated and are looking for work. They are particularly in need of volunteers and interns since Sequestration and during their peak need times, like after the summer.

Sehin: Said she would find this system to be very useful especially since NECC has such a strong ASL program, she could use it to find qualified students interested in the field.

Kim: Is not sure how she would use the system. She explained that she gets inundated with resumes for non-clinical jobs, and for clinical jobs, she isn't looking for people right out of school, she needs candidates with experience. Additionally, many of the positions are per diem. Therefore, to a certain extent, it would be helpful, but an alumni area on the system would be better so she could find experienced candidates.

Ashley explained that the system would be set up for alumni profiles and that it links seamlessly with Linked In.

Kim: Thought this was a great feature. She said that sometimes she reaches out to schools but it's for their experienced past students. Alumni need to realize that employers will get a hold of them through the school.

Ashley: asked Kim specifically is she saw the system being helpful for possible volunteer opportunities

Kim: Said she does have some volunteer opportunities now, just not as abundant as in the past. Some areas of the hospital do externships. Therefore, she thinks that the volunteer option is a possibility she is just not sure how extensive it would be. She does, however, see many students there for the clinical things.

Question 4: What is the best strategy for NECC to market this system to employers?

Kim: Suggested an email blast or direct calls to employers, recruiters, people on our system in the last 60 days, and advisory board members. She said that we need to emphasize the positives such as, no cost to employers. We need to demonstrate to the employer what the system is going to get them – i.e. we have students here that are ready to go or our placement here is so high. Sometimes she gets students who are not ready, so the school should say, in 6 months we are going to have students who are ready for jobs, they have done all these great things and here are examples.

Deborah: Are there any professional associations that you are all involved with that could be resources for us?

Kim: The Chambers of Commerce send flyers each month. We could attach information to them. They sometimes will do an “Employer Highlight” and we could have them pick NECC. Also, we could host a mixer at the college to draw in employers from around town and showcase our offerings.

Sehin: Wondered if the college works with their HR division. She will send us the contact information for the women in HR who works specifically on recruiting for the state.

Kim: Noted that NEHRA offers membership for a fee and with it you can see all of the HR people in the hiring field and how to contact them.

Karen: Says an email blast would be great and she would forward it to her contacts, as well.

Deborah: Noted that we should follow up and see when and where NEHRA is attending meetings so that we can network with them about what the college is trying to do.

Dawna: Said that the Chambers of Commerce also has HR groups which meet monthly to discuss topics. At these meetings local people can present briefly. This could be a great opportunity for NECC and our president probably has contacts with all the chambers

Ashley: wondered if we should also spend time connecting with employers and community partners face-to-face.

Priscilla: Said that it is important to get a feel for each employer’s needs and desires with the relationship and to take both approaches into consideration.

Karen: Informed us that developing relations with employers may be a slow process, because in the past there has been a lack of follow through on the college’s part. Now the college has some work to do and has to be persistent in creating those relationships again.

Priscilla: Seconded Karen’s comment and thinks that the system will help with this and will make the process more consistent.

Question 5: Are there any reasons why you would not use this system?

Dawna noted that it will take a little bit of up front effort by employers to create profiles and login information, with contact information, what they do, a short mission state, etc. We ultimately want a process that helps us screen employers to ensure that they are legitimate in order to protect our students.

Karen: Said this would not be an issue for her, she is used to doing this every time she posts somewhere.

Priscilla: Doesn’t think it would be an issue, but want to run it by her HR team, she asked us to summarize information so that she can make HR aware of it.

Karen: Wondered if there will be a contact person.

Ashley explained that once we hear about budget approval, we will reach out and let everyone know the logistics and expected time frame. She also assured the group that with this system there would be a point of contact at the college.

Deborah asked as a follow up what they might look for in a college online job posting system. She explained that we have some flexibility in the set up on the first round roll out.

Karen: Would like to know what program the students are in so she can have access to the students in the program she needs.

Deborah: Asked if they would like the college to verify the student's information on their profiles.

Sehin: Said this was not necessary, noting that if someone puts something on their resume and they can't prove it then that is not a good sign.

Priscilla: Said the more information they can compile and prepare, the better off they will be for the position.

Question 6: Are there any other ways NECC can work to recruit with your companies besides the website?

Karen: Once their new facility is opened, students will be able to just walk over from the Haverhill campus and say they interested in volunteer opportunities.

Ashley: noted that the college should do a better job at reaching out and utilizing partners, as they seem very willing to help out with placing our students.

Sehin: Her company does a lot with internships. However, they also have a volunteer coordinator; she will send her contact information. Sehin looks forward to continuing to work with us; especially because of NECC's ASL program. She wants to have a relationship with NECC and the person who handles the posts.

Deborah: Asked does anyone have work study opportunities or have offered in the past?

Karen: Has a work program with Whittier, but hasn't has one with NECC.

Priscilla: This year they had a couple from the human services program and have had great experiences.

Sehin: Does not think they have a work study program.

Dawna told the group that work study is pretty limited in the hours per week they can work.

Question 7: As employers, what career assessment tools are recognized in your industry?

Deborah, Ashley, and Dawna explained that the college is trying to determine the best tools to use with students and is looking to find out their experiences and thoughts about the tools the college currently uses such as, Holland, MBTI, Strengths, and DiSC. We explained each tool and how the college uses them.

Karen: Said she recently used DiSC with managers and it was very helpful. MBTI she did a long time ago but found DiSC more effective.

Priscilla: Asked which assessment the students enjoyed most?

Dawna: Explained how Strengths was used in CSS to show students how to use their strengths to overcome challenges, while MBTI is used more in an advising capacity with a much smaller number.

Ashley: Mentioned that was a good point and that we should follow up with our students.

Sehin: Said that each agency varies greatly. Some use questionnaires before they interview candidates, others have quizzes regarding the position and functions, with specific questions. No one specifically uses tools like these; however, she thinks it would be nice if they did.

Priscilla: Questioned how often the college does these assessments with students, particularly because students often will change their mind about what they want to do.

Dawna: Explained the effectiveness and proof of how the tests work and that typically people's core will not change significantly, particularly with StrengthsQuest, who only allows you to take the test once.

Note: none of the candidates had ever heard of StrengthsQuest.

Question 8: How do you view career portfolio in the job search process?

Priscilla: Finds them extremely beneficial because it helps to formulate questions based on the information that is presented to her. She can easily see the candidate's work and accomplishments. Lately, she sees more professionalism and preparedness of candidates coming in to the interview. Candidates typically bring hard copies binders of their portfolios with samples of what they have done and their resume.

Sehin: Said she doesn't see them, but believes portfolios are helpful in guiding and enhancing the interview questions and discussions.

Ashley: Asked the participants what they thought about electronic portfolios, would they take the effort to go online and look?

All said yes.

Karen and Sehin: Have both never seen portfolios used, only on social links like LinkedIn, but not in employment applications.

Question 9: What kinds of things would be useful for students to include in their portfolios?

1. School projects are great, especially for students who work full time while attending school - they may have a hard time getting volunteer experience or participating in campus organizations
2. Volunteer experience is great because it demonstrates they did things on their own time
3. Overseas experiences
4. Lesson plans

5. Resumes
6. Certifications

Question 10: Our goal at NECC is to foster mutually beneficial relationships between the college and its local employers and community partners. What is the best way for the college to do this?

Priscilla: Giving us well-prepared candidates who are willing to provide service to our organization is the best way to foster great relationships. She was curious to know when the college will implement this project

Dawna explained our strategic planning process, our goal team's work, and the next steps.

Ashley: Suggested a possible employer networking night at the college, wondering if that would be helpful for them.

Karen: Said that Mary Giovani used to have a group of non-profits get together. This did not last long because it was not very well attended, but it was a great idea in theory. She had three events where people in the field met and discussed important issues and to network. She always proposed to the group specific topics to discuss. It was a good way to get practitioners in a room together to hash out issues. She thinks it is always helpful to get together with people in her field.

Note: Keep in touch both by email and face-to-face as appropriate, invite them to activities, career fairs, mixers, etc.

Question 11: Are there any other questions or comments?

Priscilla: Reiterated that this was a great idea and that she is looking forward to hearing about future plans.

Ashley promised to keep all participants up-to-date on any decisions and next steps. She also discussed alternate plans to work with employers and continue to grow relationships in case the system is not approved by the budget.