

Connecting the Dots: MRE and Workforce Development

Stable employment and job opportunities are important to the well-being of families. In this recession, unemployment rates are the highest they have been in two generations. Many families are struggling with economic stability. Marriage and relationship education (MRE) providers should: 1) be prepared to help clients navigate the workforce system as un/underemployment can place stress on the couple relationship and 2) work with the local workforce board as a partner in strengthening the community. This Tip Sheet provides an overview of employment services, briefly discusses the connection between healthy relationships and the workforce, and offers tips for MRE practitioners to collaborate with employment services and connect their participants with them.

Workforce Investment Boards/ Workforce Development Boards

In 1998, the federal government attempted to streamline the maze of agencies under one umbrella with the [Workforce Investment Act \(WIA\)](#). This law established a “one-stop” approach that would fill the needs of two important customers: the job seeker and the employer. Additionally, it provided the guidance for each state to create Workforce Investment Boards (also called Workforce Development Boards).

Know your state’s board structure (for example, is it regional?) and be familiar with the services that are provided. Learn about the volunteer appointees and who appoints them.



Under the law, the volunteer members of State and Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) are appointed by Chief Elected Officials, like the governors at the state level and county judges and mayors at the local level. The members of that board are made up of representatives from both the public and private sector, with the majority being representatives of the private sector. Larger, more populated states have opted for a state board as a rule-making body and local, regional boards as deliverers of the hands-on services for job seekers and businesses. In smaller or less populated states, the state has the option of keeping the primary duties at the state level and delivering services on a regional level. Local Workforce Investment Boards are given the choice of broadly defining options and categories of services to be offered in their area, as well as defining the demand occupations and targeted industries as long as they stay within the boundaries of statutory requirements. They are funded by both federal and state grants, some of which can be for selective populations (like TANF recipients).

Employment Services

The heart of the workforce system is the [One-Stop Career Center](#), which may go by a variety of names depending on the state (for example, in Connecticut they are called “Connecticut Works” while in other states each area center has a different name). It is the access point to quality jobs and other local resources and assistance. There are more than 3,200 centers located across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Services offered by these centers are geared toward unemployed and underemployed adults (and some youth depending on the area).

Employment Services are intended by statute to provide a variety of employment related labor exchange services including but not limited to:

- Job search assistance
- Job referrals
- Placement assistance for job seekers
- [Re-employment services to unemployment insurance claimants](#)
- Recruitment services to employers with job openings

Depending on the needs of the labor market, other services such as job seeker assessment of skill levels, abilities and aptitudes, career guidance, job search workshops and referral to training may also be available.

Why Healthy Relationships Matter to the Business Community

According to recent research, healthy marriages are good for employers as well as employees.

Employees in successful, stable and healthier relationships increase profits for their employers because they tend to be committed, dependable and motivated. Conversely, employees in failing relationships tend to cost employers money in lost productivity and profits. In fact, researchers estimate that \$6 billion is lost by American businesses due to decreased productivity stemming from marriage and relationship difficulties.

Employees can bring the skills they learn in an MRE curriculum to the workplace. Communication techniques, problem solving methods, practice in conflict resolution and managing one’s emotions all lead to increased productivity in a work setting. They also enhance interviewing skills for job candidates. A recent study of office productivity compared the most productive and least productive departments of an organization on a wide measure of relationship skills. They found that, despite equally high levels of work stress, the group with greater relationship skills were more productive than those who did not have the relationship skills. Also see NHMRC Tip Sheet [Connecting with the Business Community](#).

Creating a Relationship with your Workforce Investment Board

Attend board meetings- MRE programs can have an active voice in the local WIB by attending board meetings and networking with board members. Take the opportunity to educate members about your programs and your participants. Make sure you talk about the communication skills and conflict resolution skills in your MRE curriculum and how important strong intimate partner relationships are to the employer’s bottom line. Present yourself as a resource to the board. You may want to bring marketing materials and tell employers how their employees can access your services.

Become familiar with your local One-Stop Center - MRE staff can be a valuable asset to the One-Stop Center staff and vice versa for referrals. Many of the services offered to the general public are based on self-service, such as resource rooms within the center. Seek permission to display information about your MRE program at the One-Stop Career Center. If you place your information at a One Stop make sure it is marketed to the job seeker audience. Tell them how these skills can help at work and at home.

Know where your program can fit into the bigger picture- With high unemployment rates, increasing needs among families, and funding cuts across the nation, many funders are looking for collaborations and coalitions that will maximize their money. Workforce Investment Boards often look for the same thing. Workforce systems are great at removing education and training barriers to employment but are often not equipped to deal with more complicated family issues that can derail a participant's career plan. As a MRE practitioner, you can provide that assistance to help the local WIB meet its goals.

Connecting MRE Participants to Workforce Services

Know the occupations that are hiring- One of the customers of the One-Stop system is the local employer. Be familiar with the [industry clusters](#) and [demand occupations](#) in your area. By having a basic understanding of these businesses and the occupations with available jobs, you can better guide your participant in a successful job search.

Discuss the role a spouse/significant other may have in helping an unemployed or underemployed partner navigate the system- In class, you may want to encourage your participants to work together as a team while one (or both) search for employment. Partners can practice empathic listening as the job

seeker talks about his or her frustrations with the job search process. Spouses or significant others can also show support by going to One-Stop centers together.

Provide participants with appropriate resources and referrals- Have resources ready from the One-Stop Center for those couples or individuals who are struggling with employment-related issues. You may want to provide them with homework or a class activity to create an employment search plan of action that includes identifying systems of employment support. This will also give them the opportunity to practice their communication and problem solving skills.

During times of high unemployment, families may need assistance with stability. Employment is essential to their success. Understanding your local WIB and developing partnerships with them can help strengthen the families in your MRE program. Furthermore, equipping couples/individuals with quality relationship skills can help them better manage the challenges they face at home during a period of unemployment and communicate more effectively with a potential employer.

Additional Resources

[Marriage and Family Wellness: Corporate America's Business?](#)

[Find your Local Workforce Investment Board](#)

[Locate the closest One-Stop Center](#)

[Learn more about demand occupations](#)

Additional career exploration tools include:

- The [Skills Profiler](#) identifies skills and matches them to jobs.
- O*NET's [Ability Profiler](#) matches strengths with occupations.

- O*NET's [Interest Profiler](#) identifies broad interest areas.
- O*NET's [Work Importance Locator](#) identifies job features that are important to you.
- [Employability Checkup](#) provides a snapshot of your employability.
- [My Skills My Future](#) provides new career options based on the skills you've used in a past job.

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