



**North Bay Regional Office & Bay Area Regional Office
SB 639 Community Conversation
April 13 & 14, 2022**

The Community Conversations for the North Bay and Bay Area Regional Offices were held on April 13th, attended by 27 people, and on 14th, attended by 50 people.

These Community Conversations were held via Zoom, and featured use of a bilingual PowerPoint deck, CART / captioning, American Sign Language (ASL), and Spanish language interpretation. Regional Manager, Lisa Hooks, and Regional Manager, Sheraden Nicholau, facilitated the meetings. Community Program Specialist II, Tobias Weare, supported the meetings via the monitoring of raised hands and chat use functions.

General Comments/Questions (Responses below are not verbatim, and are summarized):

- Assumptions and lowered expectations: Others have assumed my child needed a job coach for menial task. (FA)
- Never have heard of the term, 'IDD'. (SA)
- As soon as my daughter was born, they wrote her off. Because of disability, perhaps also because she's black and brown. She's in her 40s, and has exceeded expectations. (FA)
- What do we mean by 'productive'? (FA)
- I was volunteering for years, getting paid nothing. (SA)
- It's a normal part of life to explore the world of work to find the right fit. I have had over 30 jobs. (Pro)
- I want to get a new job; I want to work at Trader Joe's. (SA)
- Some people have never been presented with diverse options; they may not know what they are capable of because they have never had the chance to try. (Pro)

- Some of us have been doing (employment services and advocacy) for 30-40 years—you need skilled staff and need to pay staff accordingly. The right staff are hard to come by (developers, coaches). We need to have a system to pay people what is needed. (Pro)
- (With the phase out of subminimum wage) we may be in a competition with other people who are working minimum wage. I wish we don't have to be in competition with people. I don't want to be in competition with people like my mom and my dad. (SA)
- It hurts to not get a job when you go after it. It makes you less confident-same thing if you lose a job.
- What can be challenging and frustrating-- lack of options for a person's best potential. Some employers are only looking for generalists, someone that can do a bit of everything, which doesn't work for many jobseekers. (Pro)
- There are economic and social barriers that are significant. (Pro)
- Dream jobs are hard to get because HR is not caring. (SA)
- Not everyone wants to work or work in paid employment. For those in the field, our role is to remove barriers. (Pro)
- One barrier: Employers are often unfamiliar with job coach functions. People can struggle to explain what a job coach is and what that means.
- The hiring process is so extensive and online—difficult process.
- The digital divide is a barrier.
- Guilt and fault are often put on the employee with disabilities for the challenges at / with the workplace.
- Qs about Sb 639:
 - Does this bill refer to local min wage or federal min wage? (Pro)
 - Some orgs hire people for a federal services contract. Does this impact federal services contracts? With this legislation, will people with disabilities be paid the full federal services contract?
 - Info about the term and use of prevailing wage. (Pro)
 - Some people are fired from jobs for (various reasons, including behavioral) but they love their day program; will those still exist? Some people can't maintain jobs at various points in their life. Will there still be day programs for those that want them? (Pro)
 - What happens if subminimum wage goes away; does my day program (go away)? (SA)
- The pandemic of the pandemic is that agencies don't have enough staff to serve the exiting caseloads, much less more people transitioning from subminimum wage settings.
 - Orgs cannot pay people enough to attract staff. It's a huge barrier.

- Advice for Job Seekers:
 - Job seekers can create hype videos (if they want a job with a certain employer)—social media is a powerful tool. (Pro)

SB 639 Community Conversation Questions

1. In a perfect world, with no funding (money) or other barriers, what would the future of employment look like for people with developmental disabilities?

- People with disabilities are measured by their abilities rather than by their disabilities.
- A healthier future. Each according to their ability. More inclusive.
- Where people can find jobs that they are interested in, without discrimination, and can get the right kind of supports to do their jobs once they land them.
 - This includes helping people find new jobs when and if they don't work out. Helping people find new jobs and recover when you experience a work loss/challenge.
- Freedom and exploration, the right to succeed or fail.
- People can have support at their job, anytime they need, whenever they need (i.e. talking to supervisor, understanding benefits, SSI). (This should include workers) with disabilities that don't get regional center services but need supports.
- Really good inclusive vocational training.
- People would be fully integrated. (Pro)

2. What needs to be in place to help a person move from a subminimum wage sheltered workshop into a meaningful day based on their interests?

- Times of rest (to address) feeling overwhelmed.
- Serious informational interviewing / discovery to find out what someone's interest is. To gather information and training for staff to find custom employment.
- Focus groups with people with disabilities.
- Training (in day programs or elsewhere) on how to look for job, interview preparation, working with someone to help them find a job, and support at the job.
- More viable and meaningful options need to be in place, early on.
 - A roadmap, early on.
 - Best practices models to share with potential employees.
 - Informed people who know all options in the state, have a hopeful attitude, and use motivational interviewing to explore the interests and abilities of people with disabilities.
- More community-based options that meet the HCBS settings rule.

- Which will change the nature of day programs by requiring integrated, community-based settings. (Pro)
- Networking: 60% of jobs come from networking!
- (Addressing / removing) attitudinal barriers. (FA)
 - Expanding the narrow view of productivity.
 - All workers are welcomed for what they are contributing.
- Teaching jobseekers about self-care and relaxing techniques. (FA)
- Coaching services and other help to talk to employers / hiring managers. (SA)
- Vendors / Capacity. (Pro)
 - Vendors are so impacted. That's a big concern; services are already at capacity.
 - I want to serve these people (transitioning out of subminimum wage) but there is concern about those growing numbers.
 - How do we get the staff needed to support these goals?
- Beefing-up staff and systems to serve more people and a variety of people.
 - E.g. People coming out of subminimum wage positions, students, people who have been out of the workforce).
- Better rates for service (from Dept. of Rehabilitation and Regional Centers).
 - Cost is a huge barrier to securing the employment service system's workforce.
 - Especially where cost of living and cost of employment service operations are so high.
- Transportation will need to be in place.
 - Including less-limited bus schedules. (Pro)
- Agencies need to better know and share knowledge of generic services.
- Benefits counseling for jobseekers and employees.

3. For people who want something other than work, what are the best options or ideas?

- Feeding creativity.
 - Human creativity through the arts.
 - May lead to a micro-enterprise: selling their products or services.
- Faith-based activities.
- Recreation (e.g. parks, community gardens, travel, sporting events, local library programs).
- People want to be seen, want to be a part of something / belonging.
 - Relationships with people.

- A purpose, doing something for other people.
- Micro-business at home (requires home internet access).
- Some people don't want to work but need to work, but have to (for income). (SA)
- Volunteer work, community work of their interests.
- Start with person-centered planning.
 - Start with what is important for the individual and figure out how to meet needs.
 - We need flexibility in programming.
- Value: choice, flexibility of funding.

4. For people who want to work, what services to support success?

- Job coaching.
- Preparation programs.
 - Job shadowing programs
 - Mentoring programs.
 - Touring.
- Benefits planning and counseling.
- Help with work relationships, speaking with supervisor.
- Being able to talk with a job coach about switching jobs or careers. (SA)
- Transportation.
- Services that do a better job surveying client to see what services they feel they need, before the job search.
 - Accommodations addressed.
 - Assistive tech and evaluations and devices.

5. Let's think about supported employment professionals - like job developers or job coaches. What additional skills or supports do they need to be successful in their roles?

- Appropriate wages / competitive wages to keep them working in this field.
 - The pay is not equivalent to meeting needs of job coaching, employment exploration, continued on job supports.
 - If you can't get a person to stay because of the low wages, then all the training and skill acquisition doesn't matter. We lose people that we train because of the low wages.
- Time and resources, to job explore for and with the people they serve.
- Continuing education, making sure professionals continue to learn to get better and better, upskill.

- Employment services agencies need to hire more people with disabilities. (Pro)
- More training for the job, so they know how to train people. (SA)
- More collaboration with other coaches in different areas. (Pro)
- Empathetic listening so that they fully understand the needs of employers they are working with to get the right person for the job. (Pro)
- Job coaches and developers need more access to public collaboratives (LPAs and BACs) for better networking and resources. (Pro)
- Connections within the same industry / knowledge of the industry that the person is seeking a job in, to better support the person.
- More HCBS grants that allow organizations to provide more trainings for free (e.g. benefits training, customized employment trainings, person-centered planning).
- More education and training for regional center service coordinators. (Pro)
- Many regional centers have hired many new staff who don't know all of the resources available to them to do their job / to support people.
 - Resources to get new employment services / service system staff up to speed.
- Lower caseloads at Dept. of Rehabilitation and regional centers. (Pro)
- Less paperwork for employment services staff, Dept. of Rehabilitation staff and regional center staff.
- More resources and orgs that are incentivized to provide employment services.
 - CIE work is complex.
 - Many day programs don't want to work with Dept. of Rehabilitation or deal with CARF accreditation (e.g. not easy to work with, costly and labor-intensive accreditations required).
 - If regional centers directly funded employment services without those requirements, more organizations would create more jobs for people served.

6. How can we encourage employers to hire people with disabilities to work at their companies?

- Using records and data to show that people with disabilities are good workers.
- Reminders of success of hybrid work and telework.
- Train employers to recruit and interview folks in less traditional ways, to find best candidates.
 - Non-verbal interviews, video auditions, video resumes.
 - Non-traditional and non-algorithmic talent acquisition streams.

- Highlight the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. (Pro)
- Ensuring all potential employees with disabilities are well prepared with the skills they need, including job specific skills, interviewing skills, etc.
- Educate them on the financial benefits.
- Education them on how to best work with people with disabilities, for the success of all involved.
- Highlight the individual's skills and how they can encourage a positive workplace culture.
- Match employers with other employers about the benefits and highlights of hiring people with disabilities
 - E.g. One employer recently said his employees with disabilities were the first back to work after the first wave of the pandemic, and were the most reliable when reopening after the first wave of the pandemic closures.
- Set up volunteer ops or internships (e.g. PIPs, SIPs).
- Expanded community awareness about the 'untapped / under-tapped' hiring pool.
- Boards of companies need better representation: board members or leadership positions held by people with disabilities.
 - Representation / a voice at the top.

7. Thinking creatively or outside the box, what kind of new programs should California develop for people with significant disabilities and or support needs?

- Expand services (increase funding) to address well-known and under addresses needs:
 - Behavioral, medical, services for unhoused people, transportation services, complex case management, complex care coordination services.
 - Service navigation, case management, and care coordination outside of regional center services.
- Broker services / bridging services to employment supports and services, from other systems.
- CIE employment guide and tools (e.g. The 2020 Employment Roadmap).
 - Will guides like this be updated?
- Better / wider spread education program for employers.
 - Training on hiring and working with people w disabilities.
- Better surveying: We need to better understand fears, concerns, dreams of job seekers.

- Better funding to expand childcare centers / childcare resources for parents who want to work.
- Programs to hire more workers with disabilities at childcare centers and elementary schools
 - Good places to work for many workers w disabilities.
 - Teaching others from an early age about diverse workplaces.
- More programs and services addressing concerns from families regarding what happens if their family members are not able to integrate into CIE.
- Incentives for more businesses that attend / participate in training.
- Programs like Source America.
- More micro enterprises and self-employment programs.

8. For a last question, please complete this thought: “Success will be achieved when...”

- When each employee and jobseeker with disabilities feels empowered, according to their abilities.
- When the proper supports are in place for each jobseeker and employee.
- When the most vulnerable in our society is valued.
- When I get the job I want. (SA)
- When everyone has empathy and respectfulness of others’ differences.
- When having a disability has no impact on employment outcomes.
- When everyone feels like and is recognizes as productive members of their communities.
- When everyone engages in meaningful activities and has meaningful relationships.