Top Tips: Identifying and engaging with participants

Connect to Work (CtW) provides employment support to disabled people, people with health conditions, and those with more complex barriers to work. People in work at risk of falling out of work can also benefit from the programme. Self-employed people can also benefit from the programme and can be supported to remain in work or to develop their business through business development and market research.

Delivery areas need to work across a range of services provided by local government and other local partners to identify and engage people with complex needs. Better understanding residents' needs can also provide insights that can be shared with other local services to improve the provision.

You can find more information about the context in which this document was developed here.

Lessons learned

The lessons below are drawn from programmes which adhere to Supported Employment models, including the Working Well: Individual and Placement Support (IPS) in Primary Care programme in Greater Manchester , Review of Supported Employment delivery within Scotland, the evaluation of the Fair Start Scotland (IPS), and the Health-led Trials in Sheffield and the West Midlands.

We have also included examples that are not Supported Employment programmes, but have key lessons that can be applied to CtW and are compatible with the Supported Employment model. This includes learning from the JobsPlus model to engage residents in social housing, and the Solent Jobs Programme which has interesting learning on developing engaging marketing materials to promote self-referrals.

Ways to successfully identify and engage priority groups to ensure they participate in the programme include:

- Building an in-depth understanding of the local needs to identify potential participants. This will help understand how best to reach them, and the organisations you can partner with.
- Investing in engaging with 'supporting organisations' so they understand the purpose and benefits of the programme, and can help with the engagement and introduction of potential participants to the programme.
- Tailoring the approach and creating inclusive and accessible marketing materials. This applies to engagement and outreach with participants, and how you build connections with supporting organisations.

Identification of potential participants

- **Establishing a clear picture of who may benefit the most from the programme and how to reach them.** An assessment of local needs can help establishing the characteristics of the groups within the area and the diversity of their needs. This can be done by bringing together information already held by local government (such as information from social care services, social housing, adult learning services, and community centres), official statistics for the local area (such as the 2021 Census), and engaging with supporting organisations (for example, Jobcentre Plus).

- **Understanding current provision of support for priority groups.** This will help avoid possible duplication of services and identify supporting organisations that could refer participants to the programme. This can be done by mapping existing services that already provide related support to residents. Existing mapping of services can be used alongside local Get Britain Working plans to identify those services.

- **Determining priority groups.** CtW has clear eligibility and suitability criteria, but local areas have flexibility to focus the provision on some priority groups to reflect local needs and provision of existing employment support in the area. Assessing local needs and mapping existing services can help to identify priority groups that may be missing out on support or would benefit from additional support.

- **Involving people with lived experience to identify potential participants.** This will help to understand the different experiences across sectors, groups, and types of work and can help build an effective support programme for participants.

Referral pathways and engagement with eligible participants

- **Establishing clear referral pathways and procedures to test eligibility.** Supporting organisations need to clearly understand how to signpost eligible participants to CtW. They need to know the eligibility criteria to avoid referring someone who isn't eligible, and they need to provide people with the right level of information to avoid giving people false expectations. In some areas, single points of referral for a wide range of programmes have been introduced to facilitate the referral and triage of participants. Partner organisations can signpost individuals to a service, which is then responsible for checking the eligibility for the programme and identifying the support programme that is the most appropriate.

- **Facilitating self-referrals.** Other programmes have used public spaces to promote the programme and reach out to a wide range of eligible participants. Local authority networks and venues can be used to reach people (for example, food banks, libraries, playgrounds, community centres). Materials need to be designed so that the programme's aims, and eligibility criteria are communicated clearly with participants as this will avoid people self-referring where they are not eligible. The emphasis should be on ensuring people meet the criteria, have an

accurate understanding of the programme, are motivated to engage with it and want to work.

Developing accessible and inclusive marketing materials

- **Ensuring information is accessible, inclusive and up to date.** Tailor the materials to the needs and interests of the priority groups. This can be done by engaging with potential service users to test the approach. This is particularly necessary for people with sensory impairments, for example making text to speech functions available on websites and material available in easy read versions.

- **Celebrating and promoting success stories.** The use of success stories can help supporting organisations and potential participants to see the advantages of the programme.

- **Targeting and tailoring marketing to different groups.** Providers need to understand the needs of the local population to develop appropriate communication channels, and tailor information to the intended audience. Marketing needs to recognise the particular needs of different groups to be relevant to potential participants. The Solent Jobs programme demonstrated that marketing which did not consider the groups and was untargeted was ineffective.

Key considerations

How can you identify potential participants?

What do you know about the eligible groups that the programme could support? What information do you need to understand the needs of service users and how to reach them? Have you identified any groups (within the list provided by DWP) that you will want to prioritise?

What is the current support available for potential participants? How will existing services be used to identify potential participants? How can you use existing resources and connections to map existing support and existing supporting organisations?

How can you seek the views of people who are part of the priority groups, on the best approaches to approach outreach and promotion of the programme?

How can you engage with potential participants?

What are the local organisations that could be used to facilitate the engagement with participants?

How will you use existing networks and community spaces to promote CtW? How can you utilise other services within local government to make them aware of CtW so they can help with promotion?

Have you distributed/made visible the marketing materials in the public spaces most frequented by the priority groups?

How will you regularly monitor the efforts to promote CtW and referral procedures? How will you monitor referral across all target groups to maximise promotion?

Promotional material and resources

Is the promotional material and resources (online or hard copy) accessible, inclusive and up-to-date?

How will you tailor promotional material and resources to reflect the specific barriers that people might be facing, so that groups see themselves reflected in your information and promotion?

Can you use success stories to promote the benefits to participants? Can past participants provide word-of-mouth referrals?

How will you tailor promotional information aimed at supporting organisations, so they understand how CtW aligns with their interests? Have you considered using success stories to promote the benefits to supporting organisations, for the people they support? Have you provided clear and concise information to frontline staff in referral organisations, to ensure they will only introduce appropriate participants?

Example of what is working well

Facilitating referrals from primary care services

In November 2024, North Central London established a mechanism that allows professionals working in primary care to refer potential participants with work and health-related issues directly through their IT system. Referred participants are then allocated to a programme to be supported into work, such as WorkWell, Individual Placement and Support or skills and training services. To introduce this system, a data sharing agreement was needed between the NHS and North Central London, and NHS.NET accounts had to be set up to receive referrals.

Building relationships with referral organisations

The Solent Jobs Programme aimed to provide employment related support to at least 1,200 long-term workless adults with disabilities and health conditions. While this programme is not a Supported Employment programme, lessons can be learned on best practices to generate referrals. Getting referrals was a slow process, as it required explaining the programme to organisations that could refer and building a momentum, a significant proportion of referrals also came from Jobcentre Plus (94%) despite efforts to generate further referrals from other partners. Note that for CtW, Jobcentre Plus is not a referral partner, though they will signpost potential participants to CtW.

Strategies that worked well for the Solent Jobs Programme included:

- Co-location of Solent Jobs staff in a GP surgery and pain clinic in Southampton was another example of good practice to integrate the programme into local health services. Having a presence in these organisations also meant that staff could ask questions about the programme and address any concerns, and referrals could include a warm handover.
- Having a staff presence in Jobcentre Plus offices, so that potential participants could talk directly to a programme staff member.
- Taking time to build relationships with referring organisations to get buy-in from managers and frontline staff. Liaising with senior staff to ensure that information gets cascaded and providing adequate briefing for frontline staff on eligibility, how to refer, the unique elements of the programme and the benefits to participants are helpful strategies.
- Building partnerships with wider partners who may work with and be trusted by the target groups. This provided contacts with potential participants who were not in contact with Jobcentre Plus, some of whom had had negative experiences of work programmes before and needed reassurance.
- Using success stories and positive testimonies so that potential participants could see how 'people like them' had benefitted from the programme.
- Advertising widely, using the local authority networks and venues to display information, using social media and establishing programme ambassadors to talk to people.