



Leveraging Collaborative Partnerships for Success: Creating System Change

"Each intern is a priority opportunity for hiring talent vs. extra hands." ~Johnny Spivey, Program Manager, Blue Cross Blue Shield

Summary

This case study illustrates how an America's Promise grantee worked with two employer partners to address a hiring process challenge that led to a mutually satisfactory solution.

Collaborating to transform the minimum entry-level job qualifications in two of the largest employers in the state, Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) and the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB), enhanced the impact the program is having on workforce training and education.



"Talent is equally distributed – requirements are not. First step is to review qualifications." ~Dr. Curtis Carver, CIO-UAB

Primary Challenge

UAB identified a significant barrier to job placement after the first Innovate Birmingham cohort graduation in May 2017. BCBS and UAB both required applicants to have Bachelor's degrees for job placement which limited their applicant pool and excluded that Innovate Birmingham participants. The Innovate Birmingham team worked with BCBS and UAB to adjust these requirements. Their human resource (HR) departments took immediate action and diligently persisted through a one-year process.

Leadership Support

Every initiative requires a "champion" and leadership support. BCBS's CEO Scott McClung was the champion for this grant program. Another leader, UAB's CIO, Dr. Curtis Carver, jumped on board to "take a chance."

Shifting Mindsets

Innovate Birmingham's industry partners agreed on the following points which required a major shift in approach and mindsets:

- The human resource departments did not see that prospects with skills, certifications and not just 4-year degrees were needed
- The value of nontraditional graduates was critically overlooked
- The hiring process needed "opening up" - too many sticking points and/or requirements pertaining to degrees, skills, quals, etc.
- Industry must identify the strongest core skills in which to invest

Johnny Spivey, BCBS Program Manager, noted that their inspiration to review and broaden hiring practices as well as that of other partners, was based on BCBS' need for the ability to hire from alternate pools. He stated that, "The number of employees retiring is resulting in critical gaps in our workforce. "These challenges were compounded with the BCBS's inability to bring in developers to train and that Birmingham was losing their workforce to other Alabama cities. "We had to determine a growth plan for knowledge transfer."

“The Innovate Birmingham partnership is a great example of how vision and teamwork can create opportunity and drive long-term growth in a community by building on a foundation of valuable skills.” ~Greg Canfield, Secretary of Alabama Department of Commerce

Results and Future Plans

The following innovations were already implemented or are in the planning stages. These are a result of changing the partners’ mindset about filling the workforce pipeline. The partners, including Mr. Spivey, now believe that “there is room and a need at the table for everyone from those with certifications to 4-year degrees.”

- Changed the minimum hiring criteria with BCBS HR to consider candidates with credentials and not only Bachelor’s degrees.
- Initiated boot camps to identify skills and develop entry-level assessments
<http://innovatebham.com/coding-bootcamps>
- Expanded the job evaluation rating process to include skills equivalents, curriculum alignment, certifications, and identify requirements to graduate via an aptitude test (to verify skills needed).
- Engaged Protective Life, another major employer partner, in this new process.



Most of the graduates of the Innovate Birmingham Development Program already have secured jobs. (Billy Brown / Alabama NewsCenter)

One Simple Conclusion

By engaging employer partners, grantees can initiate transformative systemic changes to cultivate entry-level talent. By working with hiring managers and HR departments to revamp their hiring practices, more candidates will be equipped with the skills required and be placed in jobs.

*“There is power in congeniality across leadership.”
~Scott McClung, CEO-BCBS*

For more information:

<http://innovatebham.com/workforce>

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