

The Diversity Partners Project at Cornell

**KTER Center's State of the Science Conference
on Employment Research**
September 6, 2019

KTER • CENTER

Knowledge Translation for Employment Research

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What do we know? Employer Engagement Lessons from the Diversity Partners Project

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Plan for the session...

- About the project
- Our findings
- The challenges of KT IRL





Overview of the Diversity Partners Project:

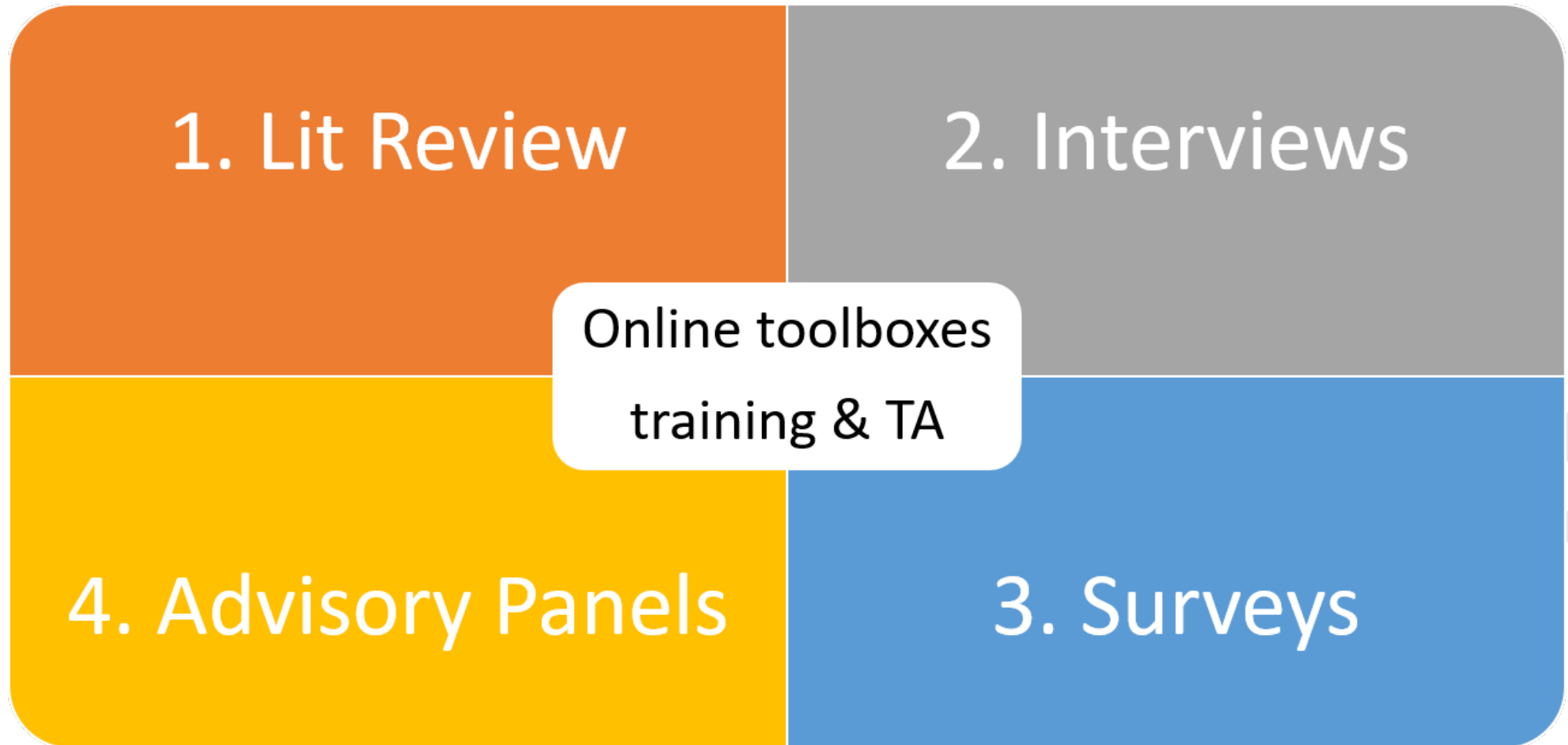
- Grant from HHS, Administration on Community Living (NIDILRR) to Cornell University
- The purpose: to align engagement strategies and increase seamless service integration between employment service professionals and business.
- Target audience: disability service providers (DSPs), workforce development personnel (WDPs), and contingent labor firms.
- New audience: educators and professionals responsible for work-based learning.

Diversity Partners is a KT Project

- Used the Knowledge to Action Framework in Project Design
- Active involvement of multi-stakeholder advisory panel
- Qualitative and Quantitative input from stakeholders
- Employer Review Panel
- Multiple usability and content checks with users



The Stages of Research & Development



Phase 1: Review of the Literature

Top Lessons on Employer Engagement

What does the research tell us?

“...there are few empirical studies of placement strategies, as compared with counseling or coaching strategies.

This paucity makes it difficult to identify what strategies are most effective for whom and how to improve practices.”

Luecking, Fabian & Tilson (2004)
*Working Relationships: Creating Opportunities
for Job Seekers with Disabilities through Employer Partnerships*

The research tells us..

1. Helping PWD's find "real jobs" *requires ongoing support from the provider, as well as flexibility and a commitment to diversity from employers* (Katz, et al 2012).
2. Provider organizations must *be responsive to the "market logic" that make up employers' everyday reality*, and provide support in the role of "brokers, guides, and troubleshooters" (Gustafsson, et al 2013).
3. Rehab/business *partnerships are not possible without a thorough understanding and acceptance of business needs and organizational culture.* (Stensrud, 2007)

The research tells us...

4. Providers must *have thorough knowledge of “place bound” jobs that can’t be outsourced* (e.g. health care, hospitality), and understand *the changing nature of entrepreneurship and social capital* in a technologically driven world. (Gilbride, Stensrud, 2008).
5. Opportunities for PWD’s can be created by *tying local and regional economic development efforts to employment initiatives*. This can be achieved by working with businesses and business coalitions to embed jobseekers with disabilities into state and regional economic development initiatives (King, 2011).
6. Unger (2007) describes *successful rehab/business partnerships as those that move from ‘philanthropic’, to ‘transactional’ to ‘integrative’* (see model pg. 46).

The research tells us....

7. Employers recommend business-led coalitions, and a *change in the way the rehab system approaches employers to mitigate the **employer-identified** barriers* of “stigma, uncertainties about applicant abilities, and the complexity of the public disability employment service system” (Henry, et al 2014).
8. ODEP-funded employer focus group recommended “a *paradigm shift*” from the corporate benevolence model to one based on *return-on-investment metrics* (NETAC, 2010)
9. Limited occupational variety *decreases lifetime earning potential* for PWDs (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2014)

Phase 2: Interviews

Lessons from Qualitative Inquiry

Research question 1:

How do employment service providers define a “good” relationship with an employer?

Phase 2: Qualitative Inquiry (DSPs)

What did *disability service providers* tell us about good *employer relationships*?

- They understand “our people”
- They understand “our services”
- A manager who will hire several people over time
- Its important – but I don’t have time

Quotes

“[A good relationship with a business is] just ongoing communication about ... helping the business understand tax breaks and incentives that are out there, but also understanding the [job seeker or job holder] as a whole, not just their behavior or what makes them a great employee but as a whole person.” – *Disability Service Provider*

“I think that if we had stronger ties in the community, even to some of the smaller stores and the local places, I think there would be more positive outcomes in terms of employment. [Developing those stronger ties would require] just getting out and getting in the community. Which, I guess, because of the caseload sizes of most of the counselors, it's nothing that happens regularly.” – *VR Counselor*

Research question 2:

How do employers describe relationships with employment service providers ?

Phase 2: Qualitative Inquiry (Employers)

What did *employers* tell us about good relationships?

- Non-profit jargon (like “placement”) creates distance and mistrust of the process
- Talent professionals should have industry expertise
- Employers need help with workforce pain points

Quotes 2

“We have certain portion of our workforce where the turnover is tremendous...we would be able to fund internships to sort of try the [job] out...or a period of time where you come in and you see if this is a skill you want to develop so you could be permanently employed.” – *Human Resource Executive*

“I would like for...placement professionals to...stop focusing on ‘26s’ so much and let's spend some more time learning about where [employers] are coming from.”- *Manager*

Phase 3: Surveys

Confirming our Findings

Polling question:

How confident are you in your ability to build mutually beneficial relationships with employers?

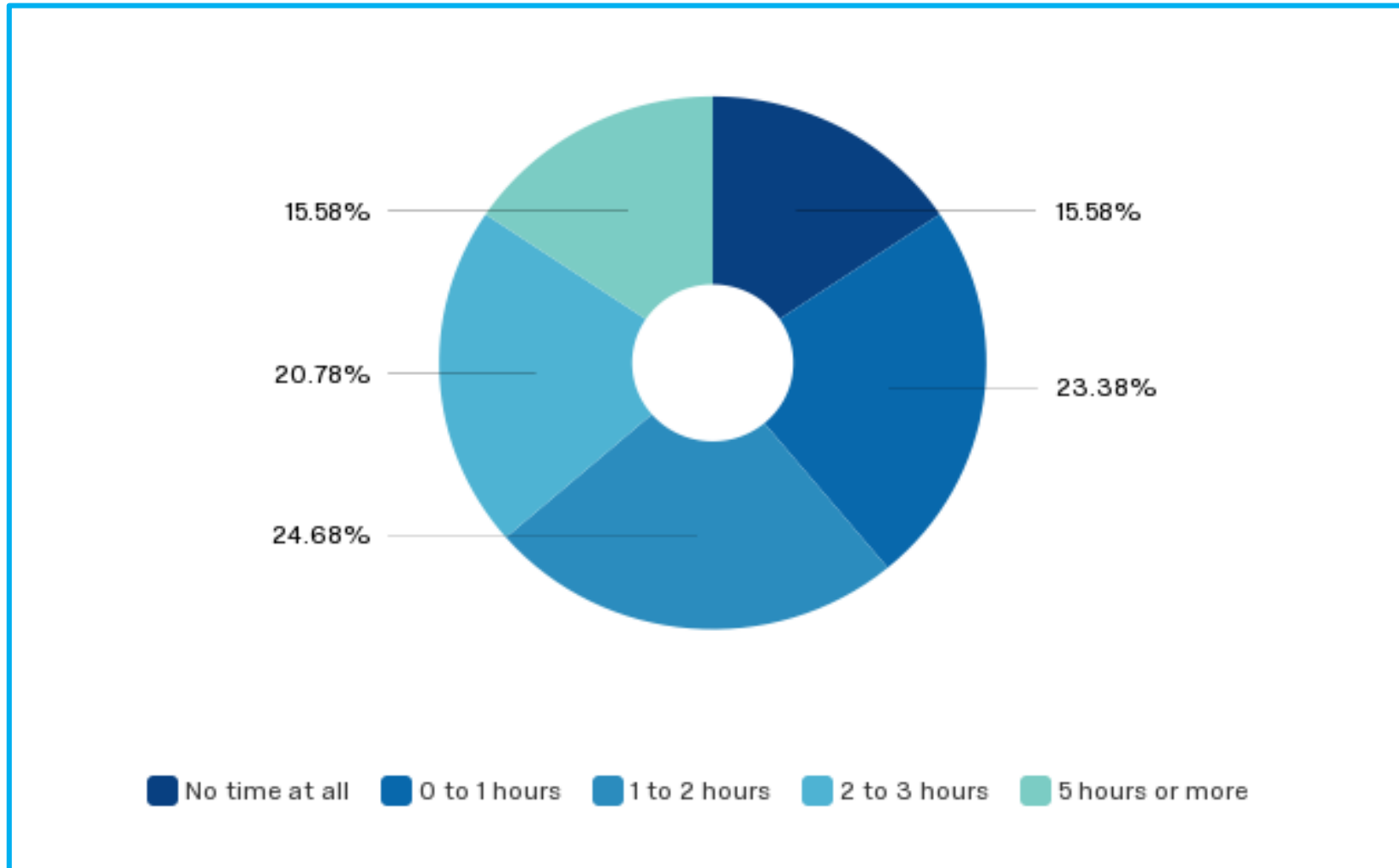
- a. Extremely confident
- b. Moderately confident
- c. Not at all confident



Self-reporting reveals a disconnect (n=418)...

- 95% of DSPs are moderately to extremely confident in their ability to build relationships with employers (60% very or extremely confident).
- 87% say they often or always focus on employer needs.

But...64% spend less than 2 hours per week developing industry specific expertise





And employers told us (n=195*) ...

- 92% of respondents told us they were actively recruiting people with disabilities.
- 80% had worked with community-based agencies.
- 77% said they were extremely or very interested in referrals of qualified candidates with disabilities.

* The 195 employers were from our email lists, not a representative sample.



What else do employers want (very or extremely interested)?

- Information on all sources of qualified candidates with disabilities (77%)
- Info on creating “disability friendly” workplaces (70%)
- Training on disability-related topics (66%)
- Support to solve disability issues in the workforce (62%)

Provider Vs. Employer (top 5)...

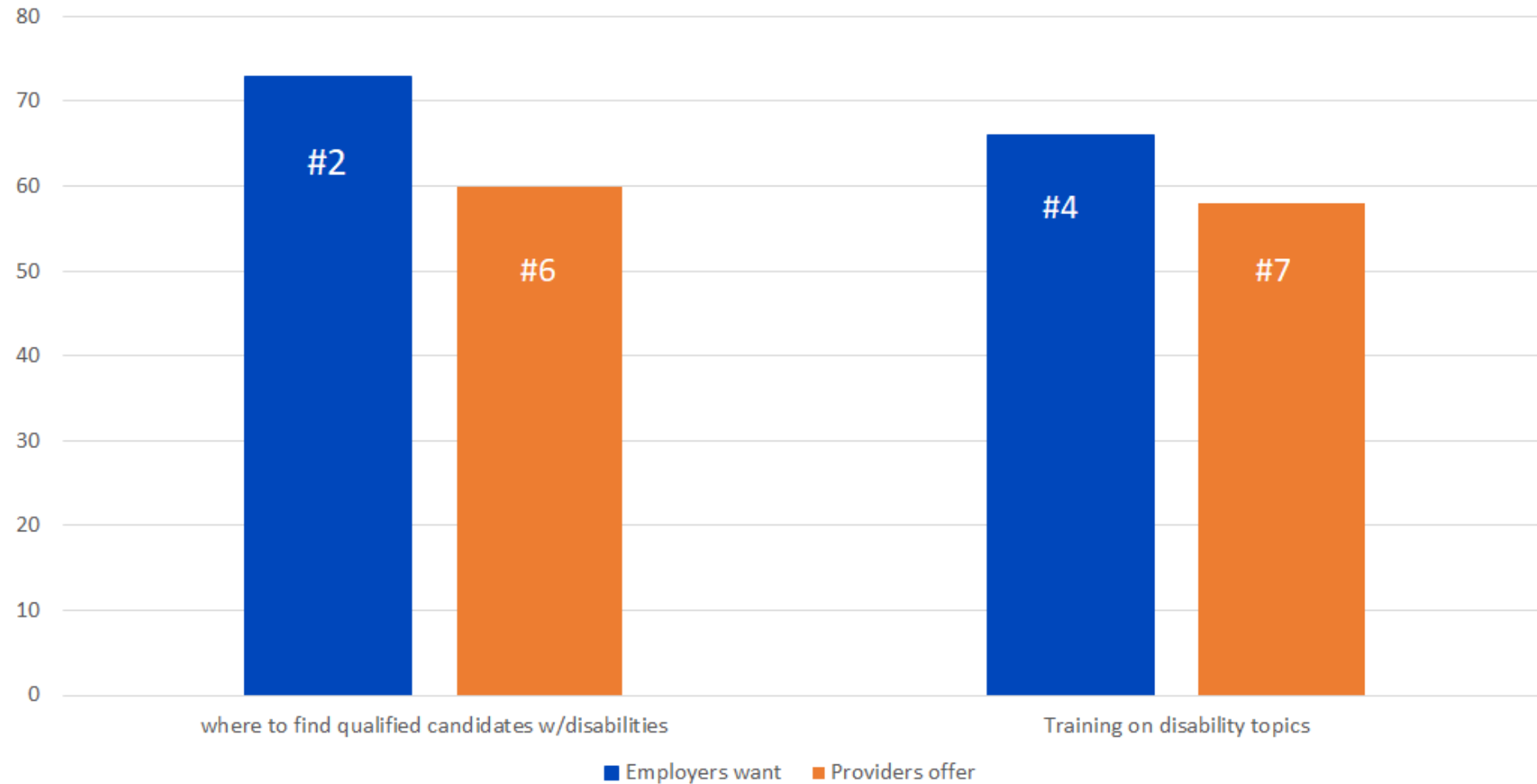
Provider provides

Support to solve disability-issues in their workforce	85.62%
Referral of qualified applicants	80.14%
Opportunities to discuss customized employment options	79.45%
Information on creating "disability friendly" workplaces	74.66%
Information about tax incentives	72.60%

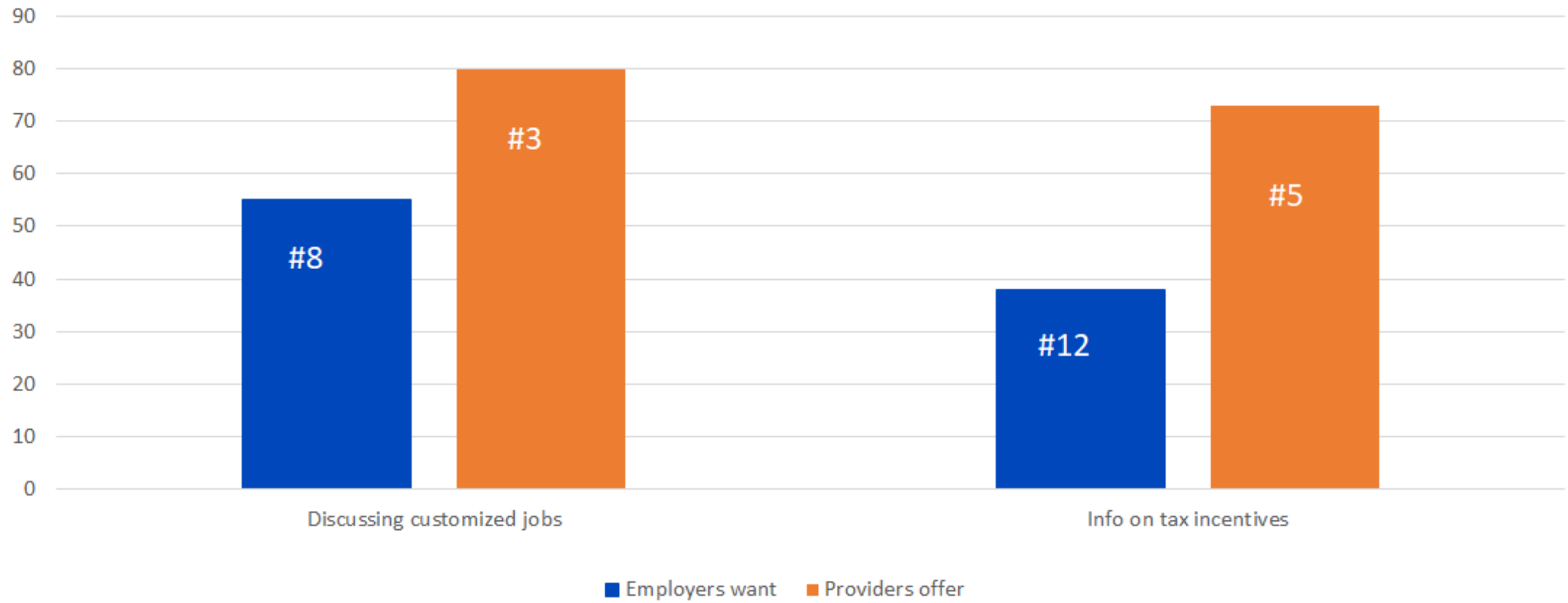
Employer wants

Referral of qualified job candidates	76.81%
Information on where to find qualified job candidates with disabilities*	72.85%
Information on creating "disability friendly" workplaces	70.00%
Training on disability-related topics*	66.17%
Support to solve disability-issues in the workforce	63.23%

What do employers want, but don't get as often?



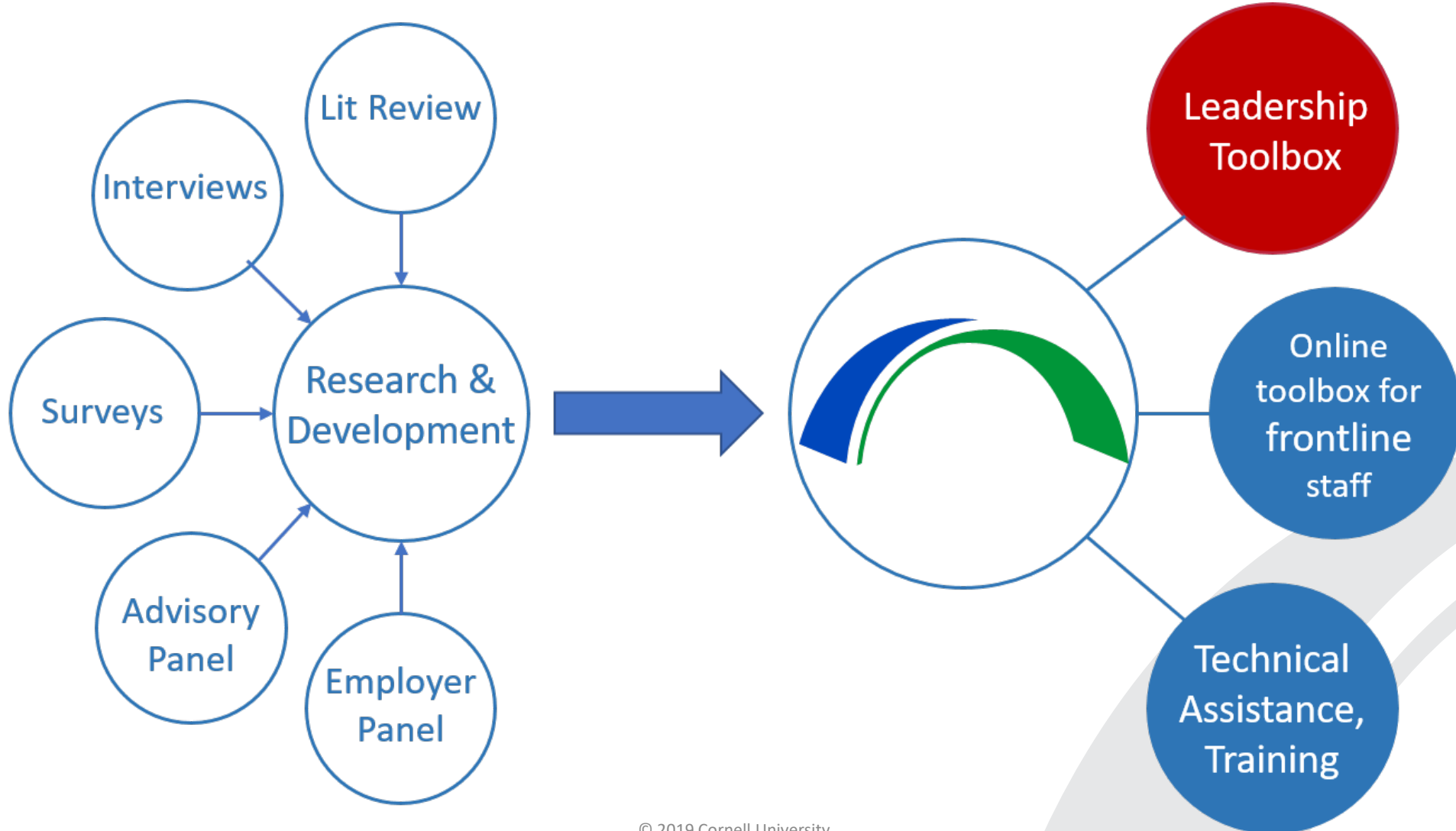
What do employers get more often than they want?



Implications for practice...

- Customization is either not well understood or undesirable to employers (cannot infer from this survey)
- Don't lead with tax incentives!
- Opportunities for enhanced services to sustain relationships:
 - Create consortia to increase candidate pipeline
 - Create and market trainings on disability-related topics
RELEVANT TO BUSINESS

How did research inform development?



What is the resulting product?



www.buildingdiversitypartners.org

The “Toolboxes”

Leadership

- Focused on planning and strategies
- Organizational structure
- Facilitators guides
- Conversation guides
- Action planning tools

Frontline

- Videos
- Worksheets
- Case Scenarios
- Assessments
- Discussion guides
- Resources



The Role of KT in Promoting Employment of People with Disabilities

What do we know about effective KT?

- KT is more than dissemination of information.
- Research tells us change must be focused on **organizations** and not on individuals.
- Making organizational change from outside of a system is exceedingly difficult.



Challenges to Program Implementation





Work and Disability: Past, Present, and Future

People with disabilities have the right and the ability to find competitive jobs and earn a living or middle class wage. But for many, this goal has not been realized. The leadership topic *Work & Disability: Past Present & Future* is designed to give organizational leaders the information they need to understand the history of people with disabilities as a marginalized segment of the workforce, in order to support and engage your staff in the associated modules of the Frontline Toolbox. The frontline modules contain detailed information, strategies and resources on this topic and many others.

A list of associated Frontline Modules appear at the right, along with guides for use in planning and implementing any changes to programs or procedures that result from organizational learning in these areas.

Learning Objective: Workforce Development

- To understand how job seekers with disabilities have been excluded from job-driven training and competitive employment opportunities that are available to other workers.

Learning Objective: Disability Service Providers

- To understand the history of segregated employment, and the importance of the current national movement toward competitive integrated employment for all.

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RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES



[Topic 1 - Action Planning Guide](#)



[Topic 1 - Conversation Guide](#)



[Topic 1 - Facilitator's Guide](#)

Associated Frontline Modules:



[1.3: Raising Expectations](#)



[2.1: Changing Expectations](#)



[3.1: Who are People with Disabilities](#)

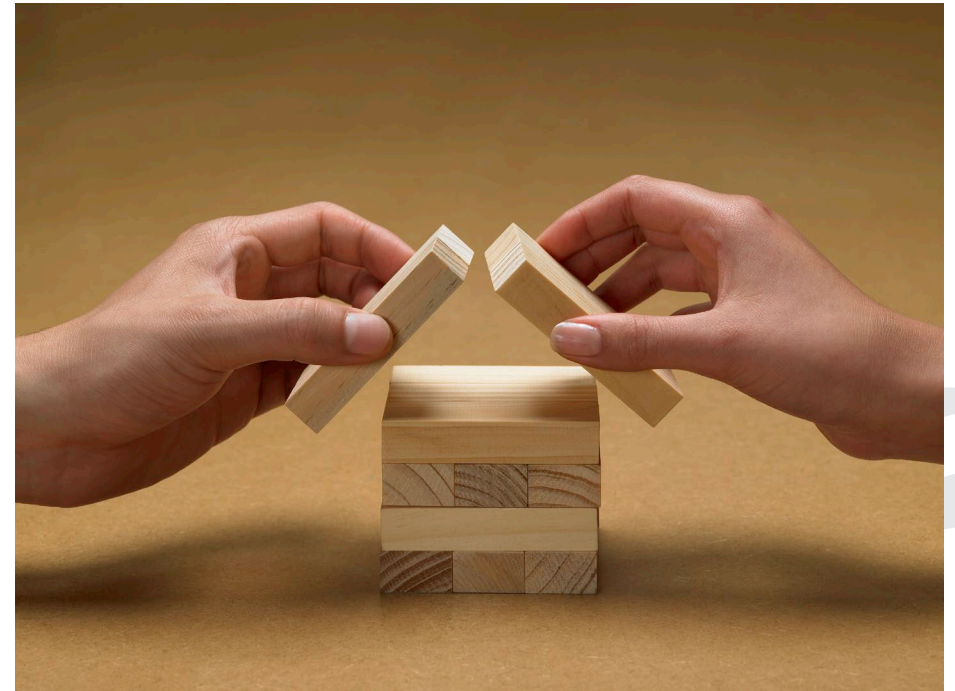


[6.1: Dealing with Rapid Change](#)

LEARN MORE

Tools to Aid in Organizational Change

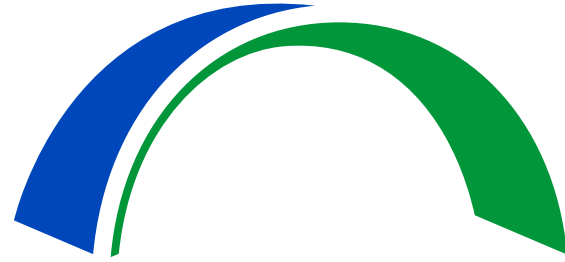
- Supervisor Dashboard
- Action planning guide
- Conversation guide
- Facilitators guide
- And, or course, front line modules to educate front line staff...



Change is hard...

- This is especially true when external pressures serve as primary drivers to services.
 - Time constraints
 - Low paid positions have primary responsibility for work
 - Funding
 - Role confusion
 - Placement or employer relationships?





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Questions

