

Validation of Perspectives of Small and Medium Enterprises on Key Findings

During the period from December 5 2005 to January 6 2006, small and medium-sized employers were contact on behalf of the Closing the Gap project. Through telephone or one-on-one interviews, a cluster of Toronto-based employers were polled on the following questions. Both the manufacturing and service sector were included in this phase of the research. Employers were queried on the following five topics:

1. Many employers do not know how to recruit people with disabilities.

Small and medium-sized businesses (SME's) agreed with this statement in general. Neither service agencies associated with the disability community nor persons with disabilities actively seek employment from the SME business sector. Concurrently, SME's do not have ready access to these communities for human resource needs. Many SME's had not considered persons with disabilities at all for their human resource needs, other than if a person with a disability applied for a vacant position in the organization. In only two potential scenarios did persons with disabilities play in the SME arena – a) if an existing employee became disabled, the company would do what was required to retain the employee upon return to work; or b) if the hiring person had a personal relationship through either friends or family with a person with a disability looking for employment.

2. Employers would like help in finding qualified applicants.

SME's replied resoundingly “yes” to this question. Because this sector traditionally does not have internal HR resources, any assistance that could be made available for SME hiring needs would be welcomed. Particular interest from the SME community was apparent if there was to be no cost to the employer, and the assistance provided would help the organizations save time and money. The SME community specifically cited that they would welcome a complete supply chain outsourcing for HR needs if qualified human resources could be made available from the agencies providing services to persons with disabilities.

3. Employers would be receptive to supported co-operatives and work experience initiatives.

This concept was very well received by the SME's, because they perceived that a temporary work arrangement gave all parties a good chance to assess whether the position would be a “best fit.” Additionally, if there were easy financial incentives attached to this type of hiring, the SME's would be even more receptive. The employers stressed however, that the hiring process must be “seamless and efficient” so that there was minimal disruption to existing operations or financial reporting, i.e. excessive numbers of forms and government paperwork.

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4. Employers would be receptive to advice and assistance on training options and accommodation information.

The responses to this question again reinforced the importance of providing resources that make it easier for employers to hire qualified persons with disabilities. SME employers all responded positively to this suggestion if it was a win-win for both parties. Any third party training assistance that increased the speed and efficacy of a new hire was well received. The SME community did stress that to be effective, it would be imperative that whatever organization provided the assistance would have to be very well versed in their company's operational requirements.

Information and assistance was also welcomed by the SME's. However, they stressed the need for upfront, "no surprises" information exchange so that any changes, for example financial expenditures, layout modifications, or job organization issues, be brought to the forefront immediately. The SME's did not balk at accommodation, unless the costs were considered prohibitive to their current financial situation. The SME's did not want to question the accommodation requests of an employee, however the employers felt more comfortable if there was an expert third-party available to provide an assessment as to equipment selection and cost allocation.

5. Should industry associations play a role in assisting SME employers with the PWD community?

The business community did not have a clear response to this question, as many SME's do not actively belong to industry associations. The medium-sized enterprises were more receptive to this suggestion than the small (i.e. under 20 people) employers. Those employers that had had experience with an industry association would welcome their the association's assistance to provide a seamless hiring process.