

GO Driver: Job-Driven Workforce Development in Charlottesville, Virginia

Problem Assessment

Concerned that nearly 30% of Charlottesville residents live below the poverty line, City Council requested that a work session be held on July 5, 2012, to discuss job creation in Charlottesville. This meeting tasked twelve members from five city departments to discuss workforce development in Charlottesville and develop a report for City Council in nine months. Their report, entitled *Growing Opportunity: A Path to Self-Sufficiency in Charlottesville*, recommended training programs that align with the needs of the business community in the Charlottesville area, resulting in GO Driver. A workforce development initiative, Growing Opportunities Driver (GO Driver), is a four-week training program that prepares low-income City residents for employment as Relief Transit Bus Operators with the Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT). The GO Driver pilot, which took place from October 6, 2014 through November 10, 2014, consisted of 80 hours of instruction on workplace and career readiness, customer service, and training for a commercial driver's license. The program has been run two additional times since the pilot, with plans for two more cohorts in 2016.

Working with an innovative and unique alignment of economic and workforce development to address social issues, the method of moving people out of poverty is no longer through social service assistance, but instead helping them get the training and resources they need to be competitive for jobs paying a self-sufficient wage. A departure from traditional training programs where training is done with the purpose of acquiring credentials, GO Driver leads the way with its job-driven approach by offering workplace and technical skills training that tie directly to a job upon program completion. By having short training periods with a clear incentive at the end (a job paying a self-sufficient wage), participants are more committed to the program and stay motivated longer. GO Driver solves two issues at once by helping job seekers learn necessary skills to become

competitive job applicants and meeting employers' for highly qualified job candidates.

Implementation and Costs

In October 2014, the City of Charlottesville started the first GO Driver program in partnership with CAT and Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC). The four-week training program consisted of intensive instruction on workplace readiness including: the Career Readiness Certificate, the National Retail Federation Customer Service Certification, and the commercial learner's permit. The employer, CAT, was invited to attend the classes and taught several of the sessions. CAT also participated by offering a tour of the facility, arranging job shadowing opportunities, engaging in mock interviewing and hands-on assistance with employment applications, and providing transportation support to and from the Department of Motor Vehicles for testing and a local laboratory for Virginia Department of Transportation physicals and drug tests.

In addition to the educational component, volunteers from the local business community were recruited as mentors to encourage the program participants to complete the class. Each participant was paired with a mentor with whom they met at least one hour a week throughout the duration of training. Mentors worked with participants to address any issues impacting their ability to remain in the program and/or successfully gain employment upon completion of training. Mentors and Charlottesville Office of Economic Development (OED) staff continued the relationship once training was complete to ensure success on the job and were available to the employers when issues with individuals arose.

Twelve program participants were recruited for the pilot program through the Downtown Job Center, community partners such as The Salvation Army, the Public Housing Association of Residents, and social media. The total cost of the GO Driver pilot was \$24,000 (\$2,000 per student). Six students were funded using local dollars from the City's Workforce Investment Fund. Six were funded using federal Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act dollars, which also allowed for a

\$1,500 employer wage subsidy per individual that was hired.

Tangible Results and Measurable Outcomes of GO Driver



Twelve participants graduated from the GO Driver pilot. All 12 were offered employment with CAT and 11 were hired as Relief Transit Bus Operators at a rate of \$15.18 per hour. All 11 are still employed over a year later. Since October 2014, two additional cohorts of GO Driver have been

held (July and December 2015), resulting in a total of 27 completions from the program. Graduates have received 27 offers of employment, 25 offers have been accepted, and 25 graduates are still employed with CAT, City School Bus, and JAUNT (the latter two employers were added as partners after the pilot).

Recently, the City conducted a return on investment study with GO Driver pilot participants to measure program outcomes. After one full year of employment: none of the graduates are receiving SNAP due to increased income; anyone who was living in public housing or Section 8 housing has either moved into non-subsidized housing or experienced an increase in the amount of rent they pay; and none are receiving Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare. Since six GO Driver participants were funded using federal Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act dollars, this allowed for a \$1,500 employer wage subsidy once the individuals were hired, saving the City a total in \$7,500 in payroll since CAT is a City agency. GO Driver also cut CAT's overtime costs (due to a lack of drivers) by \$60,000 in the first year, thus saving the City additional money. Based on the success of GO Driver, additional jobs-driven training programs have been designed or are being designed by the City. These include:

GO Clean, GO CNA, GO Hospitality, GO Electric, and GO Office.

Lessons Learned

After three successful cohorts of GO Driver, the need for supportive services for program participants to ensure that they are able to complete training and then obtain employment after training has been GO Driver's greatest obstacle. The level of need for these services was not expected. Since GO Driver is directed towards low-income residents, program participants face many barriers such as childcare, transportation, and housing. If any of these issues remain unresolved, they have the potential to impact a person's success in the program and on the job. To combat this obstacle, City Council approved an additional full-time employee in the Office of Economic Development to assist with these training programs. The City has also strengthened its partnership with Charlottesville Works (an affiliate of the Chamber of Commerce) to help participants with barriers. Examples include: assistance with childcare costs, assistance with down payments on vehicles, help purchasing eyeglasses for driving, and language tutoring for participants whose native language is not English.

One of the main things learned through GO Driver has been that the City cannot make a program of this magnitude happen without engaging stakeholders (internal and external) and collaborating with community partners. As mentioned, the program started with City Council through an internal collaboration that required everyone to stop working alone (resulting in duplicated efforts) and instead work together and start combining their strengths to develop targeted workforce development programs. GO Driver has also required extensive external collaborations, from engaging 20-plus service providers to help recruit participants for the program, to partnering with the community college for the curriculum design and instruction, to building relationships with employers (like CAT) to make sure that participants have a job at the end of training, to working with local non-profits to ensure that participants have access to supportive services that might

inhibit their ability to obtain and/or maintain employment, to working with governmental agencies to leverage federal and state dollars that subsidize the cost of training.

GO Driver has truly pioneered a new model of creating self-sufficient employment for the City of Charlottesville's residents. Again the benefits of such a program are two-fold: 1.) employers obtain the qualified candidates that they need in order to operate effectively, and 2.) job seekers receive the training and resources they need to become competitive candidates for jobs paying a self-sufficient wage. According to Juwhan Lee, Assistant Transit Manager with CAT, "While the objective of the GO Driver program was to provide jobs for City residents, the benefits for CAT have been tremendous. The program's flexibility, commitment to the applicants as well as the employer and the resources available through the program have allowed CAT to receive high quality applicants that were successfully converted to valuable employees. Due to the success of the pilot program, CAT will be continuing the partnership with the Office of Economic Development to continue the GO Driver program."

The GO Driver model of job-driven workforce development training could be easily transferred or replicated in other jurisdictions, as the model and partners are not specific to Charlottesville (i.e., most jurisdictions would have some equivalent of the community partners required to make the program work such as a community college, social service agency helping with supportive services, agency administering federal WIOA funds, etc.). Thus, each community could thus initiate training programs tailed specifically for their local employer and residents' needs. Due to the success of GO Driver and subsequent GO programs, the City has made numerous presentations to other localities/groups/agencies interested in duplicating the model.