



Way 2 Work



Recruiting Transition Youth in Research: Lessons Learned

Background

Recruiting students with disabilities into field-based randomized controlled trials requires diligence, flexibility, and collaboration. However, information is lacking about effective recruitment practices to achieve enrollment targets in trials of special education and transition interventions. In this report, we describe recruitment strategies used in a state-wide, field-based trial of a career-based intervention for transition-age students and recommend ways for managing recruitment challenges.

Way2Work Maryland

Way2Work is a two-group randomized controlled trial comparing the impact of an innovative career-based intervention for transition-aged students with disabilities to a control condition of usual services on several academic and career outcomes. We recruited 401 students across eight selected local education agencies (LEAs) that included 71 high schools. LEAs were selected via a competitive proposal process; each LEA was required to designate a lead staff member to assist in recruitment. Way2Work staff managed recruitment, monitored service delivery, and provided ongoing technical assistance on project implementation. We launched two project cohorts in fall, 2017 and fall 2018 respectively.

Recruitment Procedures

- Partner with LEAs
- Hire full-time recruitment manager
- Establish dedicated recruitment website, telephone, email
- Offer incentives for enrollment
- Track recruitment activities in real-time
- Ensure data confidentiality

Way2Work Recruitment Practices

We used five recruitment strategies to meet our enrollment target. Across the two cohorts and the 8 LEAs, about 3500 students met study selection criteria (IEP or 504 Plan; two years from school exit). Enrollment targets for each LEA were capped at 50 students.

- **LEA Introductory letter/email to potentially eligible students.** By federal law, only LEAs had information for potentially eligible students/parents, and only LEAs could mail/email an introductory letter to each student/parent, which described the study, enrollment steps, and project contact information.
- **School-based recruitment events for students and parents.** Way2Work and LEA staff partnered on informal evening recruitment events held at local high schools, inviting families to learn more about the study. Invitations to the events were sent approximately two weeks in advance. Where possible, parents and students completed consent/assent forms, project enrollment forms, and a baseline survey.
- **Outreach to students during the school day.** Way2Work staff conducted in person site visits during the school day, where LEA staff invited students to learn about the study and to take home project information and enrollment forms.
- **Parent-initiated contacts to Way2Work staff.** By phone or email, parents could contact either LEA or Way2Work staff after hearing about the study for additional information. Way2Work staff followed up by phone or email.
- **LEA-initiated contacts to students and parents.** LEA staff facilitated recruitment by making phone calls and talking to families personally, then referring those who were interested to Way2Work. Way2Work staff followed up by phone or email.

What We Learned



A Way2Work participant completing a Work Based Learning Experience as a glass cutter

Group recruitment events with students and parents yield highest enrollment ratios. Face-to-face recruitment events for eligible students and their families yielded the largest number of enrollments. Onsite at the events, most students and parents completed consent/assent forms, and the project baseline survey. Events conducted prior to the start of the school year yielded the highest attendance.

Rapid response to all project inquiries by interested students and parents. The speed with which recruitment staff followed-up with potentially interested families was essential; follow-up within 24 hours of initial contact was ideal. Using a variety of call-back methods (phone, text, email) increased the likelihood of reaching students and parents. Families with the ability to download, print, and electronically return consent/assent forms were more likely to enroll.

Design recruitment materials to attract students and parents. LEAs were required to make the first contact with all potentially eligible students/parents by an initial mailing. Shorter, more focused letters accompanied by an attractive flyer about an upcoming recruitment event elicited more interest in study participation compared to letters containing excessive and distracting detail.

Systematically tracking recruitment activities in real-time. Using a Google drive, Way2Work recruitment staff continually updated enrollment progress, allowing real-time tracking of recruitment and enrollment status of each potentially eligible student, recording reasons for non-enrollment in the study, and jointly trouble shooting obstacles to recruitment.

Recruitment Outcomes

Enrollment by Recruitment Strategy	Number Contacted	Number Enrolled
LEA Introductory letter/email to potentially eligible students	3500	37
School-based recruitment events for students and parents	214	178
Outreach to students during the school day	79	33
Parent-initiated contacts to Way2Work staff	86	74
LEA-initiated contacts to students and parents	115	79

Note: We logged 535 participant contacts across the 8 sites subsequent to the introductory letter sent by LEAs.

Sponsored by:



COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING,
HIGHER EDUCATION AND
SPECIAL EDUCATION



THE MARYLAND WORK-BASED LEARNING COLLABORATIVE IS FUNDED THROUGH A COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT WITH THE MARYLAND DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (DORS) FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (RSA), GRANT H4213160006.

Lynn Cook, Recruitment Manager, and Taylor Morris, Research Assistant, prepared and designed this report.