

Partners with Business:

An Innovative Workplace Support Option

People with disabilities are ready, willing, and able to work. They bring valuable skills, reliability, and diverse perspectives to the workforce. Hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense.

- Employees with disabilities have an average turnover rate of just 8%, compared to 45% for other workers, making hiring people with disabilities a strong strategy for improving staff retention.
- Job performance ratings for employees with disabilities are nearly identical to those of their peers without disabilities.
- Employees with and without disabilities generally require similar levels of supervision.
- Consumer research shows that 87% of customers prefer to support businesses that employ people with disabilities.
- More than 50% of workplace accommodations cost nothing to implement.
- For every \$1.00 invested in accommodations, businesses receive an average return of \$28.69.

Some employees with disabilities may receive additional support from employment specialists (called job developers or job coaches) who partner with businesses to promote successful, welcoming employment experiences. These specialists consult with employers on effective hiring, training, and supervision practices to create workplaces that value everyone. They can also provide on-the-job supports as needed to ensure the employee's success.

However, there is an alternate path to providing an employee with a disability with long-term support on the job. This approach is known as the **Partners with Business** model, and it allows the employer to designate existing coworkers or supervisors to provide the ongoing support the employee needs. These designated staff receive guidance and training from an employment specialist as needed, and the business is reimbursed for the time they spend offering this additional support. This model promotes natural workplace support and strengthens team integration. An employment specialist will provide regular check-ins and back-up assistance, as needed.

How is the reimbursement rate for Partners with Business determined?

The reimbursement rate is calculated based on the individual support needs of the employee and the actual time coworkers or supervisors spend providing that support. The employer and employment specialist work together to assess the job tasks, level of independence, and type of support required for the employee. Using this information, a formula is applied that reflects the employer's cost for providing this additional support, ensuring the reimbursement is fair and tailored to the specific situation. For example, if coworkers provide one hour of intermittent support during the employee's six-hour shift, the employer would be reimbursed for one hour of support each day the employee works. Providers are reimbursed on a monthly basis.

What are the advantages of Partners with Business?

- **It's seamless and unobtrusive.** Managers directly supervise employees and integrate support naturally into the workplace because outside job coaches aren't present on-site.
- **It provides consistency.** Unlike agency job coaches who may change over time, Partners with Business places support within the employer's team, offering stability that benefits both the employee and the business.
- **It promotes a welcoming environment.** Employers support and supervise employees with disabilities just like their coworkers, encouraging independence and building stronger workplace relationships. Employers and staff receive training from employment specialists on effective ways to support employees with unique needs.

Where does the funding come from to reimburse employers?

Publicly funded programs that serve people with disabilities provide reimbursement for job support. These include state vocational rehabilitation services under the Department of Workforce Development, Medicaid-funded long-term care services through the Department of Health Services, and school-to-work transition funds managed by local school districts.

Where is Partners with Business being used?

Partners with Business originated in the Madison area more than 20 years ago and has since expanded across Wisconsin and into other states as an innovative model of workplace support. A wide range of businesses have successfully implemented this approach, including nursing homes, restaurants, offices, radio stations, retail stores, country clubs, production facilities, fitness centers, and warehouses. This model can work in any setting where employers are committed to helping their employees succeed.

How can I learn more?

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