

Survey of Business Enterprise Program Directors Reveals Core Training Needs for Online Training Curriculum

What Were We Trying to Learn?

What are the most important training topics that need to be covered by BEP staff members?

Key Terms

BEP: Created by the Randolph-Sheppard legislation of 1936, the BEP gives priority to blind entrepreneurs to run food service facilities located on federal property. In later years, the program expanded to include state, county, and municipal facilities as well. Today, over 2,300 legally blind BEP entrepreneurs work as self-employed business owners who successfully operate a wide range of facilities, from vending machine routes to full-service cafeterias. BEP staff work closely with entrepreneurs to troubleshoot problems and provide advice and ongoing training.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

- **State directors identified business management and interpersonal skills as the top two most important categories of BEP staff training.** Within these broad categories, marketing, customer service, and communication skills were identified as the most essential training topics. These are all areas where BEP staff work closely with entrepreneurs to improve their business practice and outcomes.
- **Online distance learning is the most-preferred method for conducting training.** Forty-one percent of directors who responded to the survey felt that online training would be the most effective way of conducting training for staff.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **Consumers who are interested in areas such as business and marketing make excellent candidates for the BEP.** Working as a BEP entrepreneur offers consumers the chance to be self-employed, independent business operators while still receiving support and training from the larger BEP community. Many BEP entrepreneurs run very successful businesses that allow them to achieve financial independence and job satisfaction.
- **National Online Training Curriculum for Randolph-Sheppard (R-S) Business Enterprise Program (BEP) Staff is now online.** Designed to help orient new BEP staff members to the Randolph-Sheppard Program, anyone, including blind entrepreneurs and vocational rehabilitation staff, is welcome to take all or part of the course. The course is composed of 14 individual modules, each covering an important aspect of the R-S program. An overall certificate of completion may be requested when a student successfully completes and passes all module quizzes with a score of 80% or better. There is no fee associated with taking and completing individual modules or the entire course.

Research Takeaway

Business Enterprise Program (BEP) directors see the most pressing training needs for BEP staff in the areas of marketing, customer service, and communication skills. Taking these needs into account, the National Research and Training Center (NRTC) on Blindness and Low Vision is in the process of creating a national online training curriculum that can be used free of charge by BEP staff across the country.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

BEP staff take part in trainings in order to refresh their skills and enhance their ability to provide advice and guidance to BEP entrepreneurs. Forty-four BEP program directors from across the country responded to a survey regarding the most pressing training needs for BEP staff. As part of the survey, directors were asked to rank the importance of 17 potential training topics.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Bybee, J., & Cavanaugh, B.S. (2014). Randolph-Sheppard national online training curriculum for program staff: Findings from a national survey of Randolph-Sheppard directors. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 108(2), 157-162.

Contact Us

Email: nrtc@colled.msstate.edu

Webpage: blind.msstate.edu or ntac.blind.msstate.edu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/msu.nrtc/

Twitter: @MSU_NRTC



The contents of this manuscript were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NIDILRR grant 90RT5040-01-00. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and Human Services and should not indicate endorsement by the Federal Government.