

Business Resource Network Program Manual

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Prepared By:

Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity
Workforce Development
State of Michigan

BRN Program Manual

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Using and Maintaining the BRN Program Manual

Information identified herein is necessary for reporting, eligibility determination, and for program management purposes.

Definitions of terms will not be given each time they occur in the manual. Definitions are included in the Glossary section of the manual. A list of commonly used acronyms has been provided as well.

References

Acronyms:

Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed	ALICE
Business Resource Network	BRN
Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity	LEO
Michigan Works! Agency	MWA
One-Stop Management Information System	OSMIS
Workforce Development	WD

Revised and/or additional chapters, sections, and pages will be issued, as necessary. Pages are numbered sequentially within each chapter.

The manual should be kept at hand in a loose-leaf notebook or binder so changes, additions, and deletions can easily be made.

Note: Dates noted as "date issued" and "supersedes" refer to issuances of this manual and are not effective dates of regulations, policies, and income levels.

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Preface

BRNs are designed to bring together local businesses with a willingness to pool their resources in order to accomplish together what they may not be able to accomplish on their own. BRNs use a demand-driven, sector strategy framework of multiple employers within an industry or geographic area, building partnerships that brings together education, workforce, and community organizations to identify and collaboratively meet their workforce needs. These employer collaboratives consistently work together to build talent pipelines, address skill gaps, and create career pathways for workers. BRN member businesses provide job retention services, training opportunities leading to sustainable employment, and career pathway development for entry level employees. BRN member businesses also has a willingness to serve a population of workers who, without support, are at significant risk of losing their job(s) due to various employment barriers.

The primary benefit for an employer in joining a BRN is the ability to provide sustainable employment to residents with employment barriers from within the employer's community and to provide a resource to employees to allow them to work towards becoming financially independent; therefore, increasing their ability to be productive, attentive, and present.

The BRN Program is a partnership between the MWA and LEO-WD. The program is an effort to promote economic excellence and talent development by engaging the structurally unemployed to provide career pathways and wrap-around services to the structurally unemployed and the ALICE population. ALICE population are individuals who are working yet still struggling to make ends meet or are one crisis away from poverty.

BRNs assist member companies by leveraging resources, ensuring employees' personal needs are met, therefore, improving workplace engagement. Success Coaches are utilized to assist employees with defined barriers and serve as a resource at the employer's location for employee accessibility. Companies participating in a BRN have an experienced Success Coach who works onsite at each business as an extension of their Human Resource Department. Success Coaches provide assistance to employees to help manage life's challenges preventing them from retaining their job.

The BRN supports eligible employees by reducing barriers to employment through employee support and training. Individuals struggling with poverty are provided supportive services, including, but not limited to:

- rent/utility expense assistance,
- auto-related expenses - including repair and purchase,
- public transportation assistance,
- childcare assistance,
- financial literacy training, and
- budget development assistance.

Through the BRN model, services are directly delivered to eligible employees to offer long-term, sustainable employment options, and deliver supportive services.

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The purpose of the BRN Program Manual is to provide definitions, policy guidance, and program expectations. Procedural guidance is also provided to assure consistency. The manual is intended for use in conjunction with any other applicable state and federal laws and regulations. It is not intended to provide comprehensive, step-by-step direction as such guidance may be developed at the local level. Every effort has been made to match this document to applicable state and federal policies and guidelines; however, if a conflict is identified, federal policy should be followed first and foremost, then state policy.

The manual is to be used as a guide to provide clarity, information, and resources, which can enhance and improve service delivery and performance at the local level. This document is a living document which will be updated and expanded regularly. An emphasis will be placed on highlighting best practices whenever possible.

Chapter 1: Eligibility

The BRN is used to provide eligible employees with opportunities for long-term, meaningful employment. BRNs are locally driven, private-public consortia whose purpose is to improve the employer's workforce retention through employee advancement, support, and training. Through the BRN model, services are directly delivered to eligible employees to offer long-term, sustainable employment options and deliver supportive services reducing barriers to employment.

Section 1-1: Employer Eligibility

Recruitment for BRN membership should be focused on small to mid-size businesses and employers who are committed to recruiting and maintaining a qualified workforce from within the communities where the businesses operate. Businesses who offer full-time employment opportunities, are experiencing high turnover rates, and willing to pool their resources, are the primary focus of BRN membership. While BRN optimal size depends on employer size and each company's level of investment and activity, on average, the minimum number of firms for a BRN to be effective is five to six.

The employer is expected to be committed to working with employees and program staff to overcome barriers employees may be facing to maintain full-time, sustainable employment. The goal of the program is to address barriers, which may prevent employees from maintaining their employment and furthering their careers and provide the tools and opportunities to maintain employment, thus reducing turnover. The employer may choose to modify employee policies (e.g. time and attendance) with the understanding this population of workers may be facing barriers, such as reliable transportation or childcare, and tardiness may not be entirely the fault of the employee.

Employers are expected to be willing to provide workspace for Success Coaches within the worksite. The purpose of a Success Coach is to provide soft-skill training and to address immediate needs of employees before an issue arises. Providing a workspace for the Success Coach at the worksite allows employees to meet with their Success Coach on a regular basis to address any barriers hindering the employee's success.

Employers are expected to allow time for employees to meet with their Success Coach when necessary. This does not need to be during production hours. Times such as before or after the employee's shift or during scheduled lunch or break times are appropriate.

Participating BRN member employers can expect to experience return on investment in the form of:

- lower turnover rates
- lower subsequent hiring costs
- reduced costs associated with tardiness and absenteeism
- increased staff morale
- improved productivity
- cost savings related to common training and worker skill building

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Section 1-2: Employee Eligibility

The purpose of the BRN Program is to improve job retention and provide opportunities for skill development and long-term career opportunities, for those facing barriers to employment or the working poor. Eligible employees will be employed by a member company of the BRN and have one or more of the following demonstrated or documented barriers to employment:

- Returning Citizens
- Homeless
- Mental or physical disability
- Substance abuse
- Living at or below the federally established poverty limits
- Lacking a High School Diploma or High School Equivalency
- Long-term unemployment
- Receiving or have received state or federal public assistance within the last 12 months
- ALICE population

Other barriers may be present which prevent an individual from retaining long-term employment. MWAs are encouraged to review each employee on a case-by-case basis to determine eligibility.

The employee, with the assistance of the Success Coach, will identify personal and professional barriers and complete a short-term (six months) goals plan to mitigate barriers. At the completion of six months, employees are encouraged to work with the Success Coach to develop a long-term career pathway plan. The BRN Success Coach will be responsible for inputting employee goals plan and barrier documentation into the Individual Service Strategy (ISS) in OSMIS to track progress for those served utilizing state funds.

BRN employees are expected to also agree to:

- Meet and work with their assigned Success Coach to identify/develop the tools necessary for success. Failure or refusal to work with the Success Coach may constitute grounds for removal from the program.
- Keep their assigned Success Coach informed of any changes to employment status or address while participating in the program.

Employee success is measured by retaining employment. BRN employee benefits include:

- Ability to focus on work activity through the mitigation of personal challenges
- Public- and employer-provided supports
- Financial literacy training and counseling
- Skill building
- Increased productivity
- Job retention, advancement, and career pathway

Chapter 2: Program Design

The objective of the BRN Program is to provide a pathway from dependence, to stabilization, to independence from supportive services. To accomplish this, success coaching is provided by a BRN Success Coach who meets with each employee and develops customized case management plans proactively addressing any barriers to long-term sustainable employment to improve employee retention. Success Coaches continue to work with employees to address barriers and to ensure the employee developed the skills necessary to navigate future barriers as they arise.

Section 2-1: Service Delivery

The MWA will establish a single point of contact for the BRN Program. The designated BRN Coordinator should be knowledgeable of the program and have sufficient authority to make program decisions in a timely fashion.

MWAs will implement the BRN model in accordance with this manual.

The BRN model is designed to be employer-driven, very similar to sector partnerships. A governing board or executive committee structure should be used to develop the BRN's mission, goals, membership fee structure, and service delivery model. The BRN's approach to service delivery must develop a framework for providing:

- Direct services
- Supportive services
- Soft-skill training
- Hard-skill training
- Other specialized resources
- A structured engagement and/or referral process to public supports

A few options are available for the administration of the BRN, including 1) contracting with a nonprofit or intermediary organization, 2) member employers dividing the administrative functions among themselves, or 3) partnership with the MWA.

It is the responsibility of the MWA to ensure employees of the program receive the identified wrap-around services. MWAs provide BRN administration and work closely with BRN member employers and employees to overcome barriers. MWAs are to ensure support to employees is provided in a fair and equitable fashion.

Working towards a self-sustaining program model, the Success Coach connect employees to resources in the community before utilizing BRN funds to meet employee needs. Supportive services cannot be provided to any employee who has not been determined eligible.

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Section 2-2: Wrap-Around Services and Allowable Activities

Success Coaches

Success Coaches offer wrap-around services in the form of personalized case management plans addressing life and work skills, soft and hard skills coaching/training, and conducting and providing onsite visits/services. Success Coaches need to be knowledgeable in other programs within the community to connect employees with community resources before allocating BRN funds to meet employee needs.

Success Coaches provide services, as appropriate, at the employee's company worksite. Onsite visits should be completed as frequently as necessary to make the Success Coach available to all the employees working at a single location. Therefore, the frequency and duration of site visits may vary depending upon the number of employees working at a single location.

Services provided onsite may include:

- employee-employer mediation,
- supplemental soft-skill training,
- management plan review,
- addressing employee complaints, and
- meeting with employees' supervisors/employers to address any company questions/concerns.

MWAs will hire a sufficient number of Success Coaches to provide services to all BRN employees. It is recommended there be no more than one Success Coach for every 125 employees charged to the BRN award.

Case Management

As part of an overall effective case management strategy, the Success Coach meets with and develops a plan with each employee. The Success Coach makes initial contact with each employee and develops a working case management plan.

The purpose of meeting in person is to identify any barriers the employee may be facing with maintaining long-term employment. Some barriers to identify may include, but are not limited to:

- reliable transportation problems
- childcare concerns
- insufficient job skills
- lack of work supplies/equipment
- unstable living environment, including homelessness
- back rent due
- outstanding utility bills

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Once the Success Coach and employee have identified any foreseeable barriers, a customized plan will be developed addressing methods to navigating those barriers and creating a pathway to independence for the employee. The plan will outline the duties and responsibilities of the employee and the Success Coach. The Success Coach and employee will meet when necessary to 1) review the effectiveness of, and 2) adjust, as necessary, the case management plan in order to ensure the long-term employment success of each employee.

Supportive Services

Supportive Services are offered to employees with demonstrated and documented needs, facing hardships directly prohibiting their success toward long-term employment and self-sufficiency. Documented needs will be confirmed by using the supportive services request and rationale form (Attachment A).

The key to supportive services is to provide temporary support enabling employees to retain employment and develop a plan of self-sufficiency moving forward. Supportive services are not intended to be ongoing or recurring. Strong partnerships with community partners, service delivery systems and other private and public organizations should be formed to offer supportive services. Success Coaches have strong community partner relationships with a range of resources and services available in support of employee needs and connect employees to them based on these needs. BRN funds should be used as a last resort for supportive services. MWAs will look to utilize community partner supportive services resources before expending BRN funds. Examples of supportive services and suggested eligibility requirements include, but are not limited to:

Supportive Services	Eligibility Requirement(s)
Purchasing of fuel cards, bus tickets, or other means of public transportation	
Assisting with automobile repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing proof of employees' ownership • Valid insurance, and • Valid driver's license
Paying utility payments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing proof of imminent shut-off and attempts to work out payment plan with the utility company
Paying housing assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee owns a home or is on the lease; and • Order of Eviction is provided • Formal Notice of Foreclosure
Temporary assistance with childcare	
Purchasing of work-related supplies such as steel-toed boots, eye protection, interview clothing, etc.	

MWAs should follow their locally-approved supportive services policy.

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Financial Literacy and Budgeting

Financial literacy is the ability to understand how money works, how to manage money, and how to live within a budget. Success Coaches ensure each employee receiving financial supportive services undergoes financial literacy and budget training, which includes the development of a budget. Success Coaches provide follow-up during case management to ensure employees are developing good financial habits.

A budget is a customized plan which identifies saving and spending habits for an individual or family unit over a specified period of time. The purpose of a budget is to express the importance of living within one's income limits while accounting for future life events. Any employee receiving financial assistance in accordance with this program is required to develop a budget, which includes a savings plan for overcoming future financial barriers that may arise.

Soft-Skills Training

Soft skills are a combination of interpersonal, social, and communication skills necessary for success in the workplace. Soft skills ensure employee success by providing them with the skillset necessary to be able to work well with others.

Success Coaches assist employees with soft skills training specific to the employee's employment needs and options. Soft skills training includes, but is not limited to:

- customer service training
- conflict resolution
- appropriate communication in the workplace
- time management
- teamwork
- problem solving
- informal leadership skills

Success Coaches are able to provide soft skills training to employees but may utilize outside resources in order to provide the best possible training options available to employees.

Hard-Skills Training

Hard skills are those tangible, easy to measure skills directly providing and/or facilitating the implementation of career advancement. They focus on training offered during employment and may be offered by the employer or an outside service provider supported by the employer. Hard-skills training includes, but is not limited to, necessary job-related or job-advancement skills such as:

- Computer skills
- Skilled Trades and/or Apprenticeship opportunities
- Management/Leadership training
- Equipment Operator training

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Section 2-3: Funding

BRN funding is available to enable MWAs to provide services to employees with the intent of providing pathways out of poverty for those facing barriers to employment and the working poor. MWAs, within their established budget, implement and operate the BRN model in accordance with this manual, with the goal of achieving sustainability before the end of the grant award period.

MWAs are expected to braid federal and other funding sources to assist employers to sustain BRN activities and supportive services to employees. MWAs manage the appropriate provision of supportive services and related payments. File documentation is expected to show BRN funds were used as a last resort.

Sustainability

BRN sustainability is a key responsibility of MWAs. State funding in support of the BRN is limited. Continuation of funding beyond the current fiscal year is not guaranteed from the State of Michigan. Implementing best practices to create a sustainable BRN should meet the present needs of employers, employees and community partners for optimal long-term retention efforts.

BRN provides mutually beneficial relationships between businesses and workforce development. Sustainability is supported by data that demonstrates:

- program efficiencies and effectiveness
- funding diversification for great impact
- collaborative partnerships that can maximize community resources

Therefore, MWAs work towards a sustainable local funding model by having BRN members contribute membership dues/fees, secure local donations, and identify other local sources of funding. Through these fees, donations, and other local sources, BRNs will be able to support Success Coaches, provide employee training, and offer additional supportive services long-term.

In order to build and sustain a successful BRN Program, the MWA commits to:

- Partnering with employers who are dedicated to offering opportunities to those with barriers to employment, providing full-time hours at a family sustaining wage.
- Maintaining a commitment to provide sufficient program staff to adequately serve BRN employers and employees.
- Sharing the wrap-around services necessary to provide eligible employees with opportunities for long-term employment.
- Partnering with area employers, community partners, faith-based organizations, and other state agencies to provide those who are willing to work with the tools they need to be successful.
- Actively promoting the BRN model to area employers in order to provide similar services to every employee in need of such services.

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BRN Budget Allocations

Budget allocations are provided under a separate Policy Issuance.

Braided Funding/Leveraged Resources

MWAs are expected to be diligent in braiding funds and leveraging resources from partners to provide the best services possible to meet the unique needs of BRN employees. These partners may include, but are not limited to:

- Area employers
- Community and faith-based organizations
- Foundations and philanthropic organizations
- Other state/local agencies

Financial Records and Reporting

It is the responsibility of the MWA to maintain accurate reporting and financial records to demonstrate funds are being distributed fairly and equitably based upon the need(s) of individual employees. Should a region realize an influx or decline in eligible employees and anticipate serving more or less employees than estimated, it is the responsibility of the MWA to communicate this to LEO-WD in order to determine the best approach for addressing the matter.

All reporting of fiscal expenditures for the funds policy must be reported to LEO-WD on a quarterly basis. A final close-out report is also required. All quarterly financial expenditure reports are due to LEO-WD no later than the 20th calendar day after the end of the calendar quarter. The final close-out report is due to LEO-WD no later than 60 days after the end of the grant period. In the event the due date falls on a weekend or state government holiday, the report is due on the last business day prior to the due date. Local areas must submit reports in MARS. If there are any questions regarding cash requests or the submission of required expenditure reports, please call Ms. Marilyn Carey at 517-241-6742.

BRN Quarterly Financial Report Schedule <i>(QPRs are due within 25 days after the end of the reporting quarter.)</i>	
DUE DATE	PERIOD COVERING
October 20, 2020	July 1 – September 30, 2020
January 20, 2021	October 1 – December 31, 2020
April 20, 2021	January 1 – March 31, 2021
July 20, 2021	April 1 – June 30, 2021
October 20, 2021	July 1 – September 30, 2021
November 30, 2021	Closeout Report

Section 2-4: Employee Reporting Requirements

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The purpose of the quarterly report is to evaluate program success and usage. The BRN metric elements sought using the BRN Quarterly Report form (Attachment A) are listed below. MWAs are expected to also provide success stories/testimonials in accordance with PI 18-27. Employee goals, progress and types of services rendered will be tracked quarterly through OSMIS entry and the completion of an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) for those served with services utilizing state funds.

The Business Resource Network (BRN) Quarterly Report elements include:

1. **Active BRN Employers:** List names of each active BRN employer added for the current quarter and County employers are located.
2. **Number (unduplicated) of Employers Active in a BRN(s):** Number of employers who have signed an agreement and are contributing funds to support the BRN(s).
3. **Number of Employees who Received a BRN Service:** Number of employees who received any type of assistance associated with a BRN, including but not limited to: telephone call, text, email, intake, one-on-one counselling, supportive services, training, etc.). This number may not match the OSMIS, because other funding sources may be used to support the program.

The initial report will require a list of employers currently active in your BRN. NOTE: Reporting should include current quarter and cumulative outcomes for each item.

Quarterly employee progress with the following metrics will be collected from OSMIS:

- Job Retention at 3, 6, and 12 months (Wage Record Data)
- Wage increase at 12 months (Wage Record Data)

The BRN Quarterly Performance Reports (QPR) are due to LEO-WD no later than the 30th calendar day after the end of the calendar quarter. In the event the due date falls on a weekend or state government holiday, the report is due on the last business day prior to the due date. Quarterly reports should be emailed to, LEO-BusinessResourceNetwork@michigan.gov.

BRN Quarterly Performance Report Schedule <i>(QPRs are due within 25 days after the end of the reporting quarter.)</i>	
DUE DATE	PERIOD COVERING
October 30, 2020	July 1 – September 30, 2020
January 30, 2021	October 1 – December 31, 2020
April 30, 2021	January 1 – March 31, 2021
July 30, 2021	April 1 – June 30, 2021
October 30, 2021	July 1 – September 30, 2021

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Glossary:

- **Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) population:** The population are individuals who are working yet still struggling to make ends meet or are one crisis away from poverty.
- **Business Resource Network (BRN) Program:** A partnership between the Michigan Works! Agencies (MWA) and the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity-Workforce Development (LEO-WD) supporting eligible employees by reducing barriers to employment through employee support and training.
- **Employee:** An eligible employee participant in the BRN Program.
- **Full-time Employment:** For the purpose of the BRN, full-time employment is 30 hours.
- **Long-term Unemployed:** According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an individual is defined as being long-term unemployed if they are unemployed and have been “looking for work 27 weeks or more.”
- **Meaningful Employment:** Full-time employment (30 or more working hours per week or 130 working hours per month) and a starting wage in accordance with MWA self-sufficiency local policy.
- **Mediation:** Information and flexible disagreement resolution process.
- **Michigan Works! (MW) System:** Workforce development system in Michigan, which is an integral partner in developing the state's economic future. The system is demand-driven, locally responsive, and ready to meet the needs of each community.
- **Small- to Medium-sized Business:** Small: fewer than 100 employees, medium: 100-499 employees. Large businesses are defined as 500+ employees
- **Success Coach:** Provides assistance to employees to help manage life's challenges preventing them from retaining their job.
- **Supportive Services:** Temporary allowable and necessary support enabling employees to retain employment and develop a plan of self-sufficiency moving forward.

BRN Supportive Services Request and Rationale Form

Supportive services are not intended to be ongoing or recurring. BRN funds should be used as a last resort for supportive services.

Date:

Employee Name:

Unique Identifiable Number:

Supportive Service Request:

Supportive Services Funding Source:

Stated Reason for Supportive Service:

BRN Success Coach Recommendation

Please attach:

- 1) Denial documents demonstrating what community partners were contacted for assistance for supportive services.
- 2) Documentation of supportive services cost.

