

# **PIMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE’S HPOG “PROMISING PRACTICE” CASE STUDY**

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*Infusing Employer Intelligence into Training Programs and Support Services*

**From the 2018 HPOG Employer Engagement Promising Practice Series**

**By Bill Browning**

## **Introduction and Overview of Case Study**

At the end of the first round of HPOG grants, Pima Community College’s (PCC) HPOG HOPES program leaders took a look at their data and questioned why their employment in health care numbers were not higher. This moment of discomfort led to a comprehensive review of employment processes in HPOG 1.0 and a focus on what could be changed in HPOG 2.0 to increase health care employment numbers. The HPOG HOPES employment team selected several occupational training programs on which to focus and conducted interviews with area employer representatives who recruit for these targeted occupations. These conversations made them realize that employment information must be interspersed throughout all HPOG services. HPOG HOPES began engaging with employers in new ways that contributed to strong health care employment outcomes for these targeted training programs. Using the newly-gathered employer information, PCC’s HPOG HOPES program designed an innovative toolbox of materials for its employment coaches to use with participants. The toolbox contents are described in the Appendix and are available upon request. PCC’s review and re-design of targeted training programs can be useful for other HPOG grantees who aspire to boost employment outcomes for specific programs.

Pima Community College is a two-year college enrolling approximately 42,000 credit students at six campus locations in the greater Tucson, Arizona metropolitan area. PCC’s HPOG HOPES program is operated within the Workforce and Continuing Education Department. The HPOG employment team that led much of the work described in this case study is comprised of Suzi Shoemaker, Advanced Program Coordinator for Employment; Carmen Carlson, Employment Specialist; and Donna Ruthruff, Workforce Development Specialist from the Pima County One Stop .

### A Moment of Discomfort Spurs Change

During HPOG 1.0, PCC’s HPOG HOPES program met most of their five year goals. On the surface, these results showed successful employment of 1,235 students. But a deeper dive into program data showed that while overall employment rates were high, only 705 students actually became employed in targeted health care roles, falling short of their original goal of 871. Further, they realized that some of these specific employment outcomes were difficult to track because the HPOG Coaches and the Pima County One Stop Workforce Development Specialist often lost touch with participants soon after completing their training programs. Student support services tilted heavily towards the college’s natural propensity to focus on academic success, and as a result participants drifted away because advisors had less assistance to offer.

With this in mind, the HPOG HOPES staff created a new position, to develop an employment approach in conjunction with their Pima County One Stop partners. Suzi Shoemaker, the HPOG 1.0 project director, was hired as the Employment Advanced Program Coordinator and led an in-depth program-by-program assessment, with an aim to improve employment outcomes.

During Shoemaker's review, she realized that certain HPOG-approved healthcare occupation training programs already had high employment rates post-graduation. For example, the Dental Assistant, Medical Laboratory Technician, and Surgical Technology courses all had close to 100% employment rates in the profession upon graduation. She chose to leave those training programs alone, and instead, focus on occupations where graduates were not finding employment, such as Nursing Assistant, Medical Assistant, Medical Office Programs, and Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN).

## **Program Assessment and Re-Design Process for the LPN Program**

Suzi Shoemaker specifically targeted the popular and demanding LPN program and led an in-depth assessment of the program over a four month period. The timeline of events and activities is as follows:

**March 2016 - Begin Assessment Process:** The program assessment process began for targeted healthcare occupations, including LPN.

**April 2016 - Refresh Labor Market Analysis and Identify Top Employers:** Suzi Shoemaker and Donna Ruthruff reviewed up-to-date regional labor market data for LPN jobs, and identified the top employers in the region. They also went on an internal "door-knocking campaign" to interview PCC staff and engage them in the assessment process. For the LPN program, these conversations identified employers that were already engaged with PCC, such as organizations hosting clinical training for LPN students. They also discussed current employment readiness programs offered by PCC. They covered what employment support processes PCC uses to help students find employment, tracking of employment results, and identified ideas on how to increase employment. HPOG HOPES and the PCC Nursing department already had a strong relationship, and nursing program leaders were excited by the opportunity for further collaboration. In particular, PCC's LPN Advanced Program Coordinator was an essential internal partner to engage, since any potential program changes would be implemented from this position.

**April-May 2016 – Conduct Employer Interviews:** In her role as Employment Advanced Program Coordinator, Suzi Shoemaker, together with Donna Ruthruff, initiated outreach to targeted health care employers, such as nursing homes, hospitals, and clinics, with a focus on LPN positions. Shoemaker combined contact information from multiple resources to compile a database of over 100 area health care employer contacts. For example, some employers were identified by pulling reports from the Pima County One Stop database that confirmed new hires of HPOG 1.0 participants. They generated more extensive employer lists through an online resource called [Reference USA](#). This resource helps workforce programs develop employer contacts lists by type of business, and provides names, emails and phone numbers of company managers. It is available for free at many public libraries. The employment team also identified some hiring contacts through [indeed.com](#), a popular job search aggregator website. Finally, they also collected contact information from colleagues within the college.

Once HPOG HOPES had compiled a comprehensive list of employer contact information Shoemaker emailed and called local employers to talk about HPOG, and the new employment processes the college established. The HPOG HOPES employment team's stated goal in these messages was to "to learn more

about your company's employment needs, how you hire, and see if there are ways we can partner together to prepare our students to be great employees for your company". They asked employers if they wanted to learn more about the changes and possibly partner in hiring LPN graduates. They would then schedule an appointment to visit the employer's facility to learn more about the work setting and the employer's hiring needs. In the spring of 2016, The HPOG HOPES employment team met with eight employers who hire LPN's regularly.

They pursued deeper relationships with employers who showed interest and those that appeared to offer quality career opportunities. They quietly discontinued relationships with those that didn't meet these criteria. For example, the employment team stopped talking with one home-based skilled nursing employer after two staff visits showed dismal working and living conditions. An interview with another employer uncovered that jobs advertised as full-time were actually independent contractor positions. These roles had less job security and the workers would have to pay the employer share of payroll taxes that full-time employees don't pay.

The conversations with local employers offered many new ways to better align PCC and HPOG HOPES employment support services with specific employers' recruiting processes. For example:

- One HR representative spent three hours demonstrating the online recruiting system, which revealed that recruiters often only reviewed the first 30-40 resumes they receive. For this employer, responding to older job posting would be a waste of a participant's time.
- Another interview revealed the employer's terminology for first aid/CPR certification was different than the language used by PCC and HPOG participants. This vocabulary mismatch resulted in LPN applicants being labeled "not qualified" for positions where they possessed the required certifications.
- HR representatives from different healthcare employers reviewed their job descriptions and explained what criteria they use in interviews and hiring decisions.
- Another recruiter did not value the "skill set" feature that were listed prominently at the top of the resume format recommended to HPOG participants. This meant that HPOG applicants didn't pass the "20-second" resume review rule and were rarely selected for interviews. The employment team learned that the "skill set" section needed to be moved lower down on the resume for anyone applying for positions with this employer.
- They also learned that most area hospitals with urgent care centers did not generally hire inexperienced LPNs, even those who successfully completed clinical rotations at hospitals. In order to help HPOG participants' land their first LPN job after graduation with a competitive wage, they would need to focus on developing employer relationships with other types of organizations.

**June 2016 – Launch Program-Specific Job Fairs:** The college held its first program-specific "boutique job fair" for the LPN program shortly after the spring 2016 cohort graduated. These job fairs are the HPOG HOPES employment team's top point of engagement with participating employers. Although the first group of graduating students hadn't taken the state's LPN licensing test, hiring demand was so strong participating employers were willing to make early offers contingent upon passing the licensing exam, since they wanted to get first crack at this new talent pool. The spring 2016 event attracted six employers and 15 graduating students (cohort participants included HPOG as well as non-HPOG students). The most recent job fair in December 2017 attracted nine LPN employers and 15 program graduates. Many employer partners are so pleased with the results, they return to participate in the job fair each term. The LPN job fairs are now held five times per year in conjunction with the completion of specific LPN cohorts. Current HPOG and PCC students are also invited to the job fairs to meet and learn about the

different types of employers in the field. For these students, meeting with employers earlier in their academic career provides motivation and the knowledge that employment is waiting for them upon program completion and passing of their state certification exam. A review of employment data from recent LPN cohorts shows this strategy is yielding results – 58% of LPN program graduates from the HPOG HOPES program work for employers that participated in a job fair.

### Pima Community College’s Program-Specific Job Fairs

PCC and the HPOG HOPES program offer a series of targeted activities during the last two months of training, and which culminate in a specialized job fair for targeted programs like LPN as described above. The job fair is generally held one day prior to program graduation. A detailed timeline of job fair planning process, including actions to prepare HPOG HOPES participants, is below.

1. Three weeks in advance of the job fair, invite and confirm employers who are actively recruiting for jobs that are related to the program. The college generally has 6-9 employers that participate.
2. A few weeks prior to graduation, Coaches begin preparing students who are completing the program, to ensure that they have a complete portfolio of materials and information needed for job applications and interviews (including but not limited to: professional references; 20 most asked industry/position-specific questions, with student-prepared answers; referral for professional clothing; and professional resume contextualized to the health sector).
3. One week before the job fair, college staff, including HPOG’s employment team members conduct mock interviews with students and provide feedback using a scoring rubric that details six competencies and three ratings categories, with the top-performing category labeled “*You’re Hired!*” [See the description of mock interview rubric in the Appendix.]
4. On the day of the event, an HPOG employment team member gathers students before the fair starts to review tips, questions to ask employers, and to help boost participants’ confidence. During the event, HPOG staff will arrange introductions to employer partners for nervous students and highlight their strengths to get the conversation started. They counsel participants to obtain recruiter’s contact information (usually in the form of a business card), so the students can follow up directly with the employer.
5. Post-job fair, HPOG HOPES follows up with participants to learn which employers the student is interested in, and arrange individual career counseling appoints when necessary.

After the event, the HPOG HOPES employment team makes a point of chatting with participating students to gather feedback and discuss follow-up actions. These may include reviewing answers to LPN-specific interview questions, and the 20 most-asked interview questions, additional mock interviews, filling out online applications, creating reference lists or cover letters, as well as making referrals to low-cost clothing suppliers for students who need professional-look outfits to wear to interviews. An HPOG HOPES employment team member asks which employers the students liked most, whom they plan on following up with, and discuss specific application processes that each employer uses. A HPOG HOPES employment team member also inquires if there are any employers not at the job fair that the student is interested in, and when possible will send the resume to their employer contact.

The employment team also collects feedback from participating employers. They discuss potential hiring interests from the event, and assess how the job fairs are benefiting each specific employer. Not only do most employers return to participate at each job fair, but the HPOG HOPES employment team reports that this initial point of engagement often leads to additional partnerships. For example, some employers ask about participating in other college-sponsored job fairs, speaking directly to ongoing cohorts about

employment, or hosting a clinical rotation or externships. Other employers heard about the job fairs and have begun contacting the college to ask about participating.

The healthcare occupation-specific job fairs have transformed employer engagement within the college in unexpected ways. Recently, an employer representative who attended the LPN job fairs asked if PCC would be interested in setting up a six month paid preceptorship opportunity, which functions much like a formal on-the-job mentoring program, for LPN/RN students. This led to conversations between the college's Nursing department and this employer to work on developing experiential training for students. PCC's program-specific job fairs have struck a chord within the college, as illustrated by a quote from Rochelle Byrne, PCC's Nursing Advance Program Coordinator. "The job fairs have been an excellent tool for both our students and our program. Because the boutique job fairs bring together a myriad of employers from all across town, it provides the perfect opportunity to bring together the administrators from the nursing program who need clinical sites and the employers who want students together for mutual benefit."

## **Using Employer Intelligence to Re-Design Employment Support Services**

Armed with detailed information about employer needs and recruiting/hiring practices, Suzi Shoemaker and the HPOG HOPES employment team began to incorporate employer intelligence throughout the HPOG participant experience. She summed up their approach by saying "we show students from the beginning that we believe in them, and this spirit of employability is demonstrated by our entire HPOG HOPES program service staff. When staff are excited about students' employment prospects, then students get excited, too." This resulted in a redesigned, more holistic approach to student support services where employment activities are baked into the student service process from the initial HPOG orientation. This contrasts with the prior transactional academic approach to student support services, where employment support was only introduced at the end of the process.

Shoemaker led an initial training for the group of HPOG Coaches in this holistic approach to employment services, including a Coach Employment Academy Guide (see a description of the Guide in the Appendix). This training helped build greater understanding about employment processes and the need to discuss employment early on with students. Shoemaker's workshop helped accelerate the culture shift of the program towards a consistent emphasis on employment and not just academic success. The accompanying Guide summarizes employer thoughts about the qualities of successful applicants, and the barriers that prevent applicants from moving forward in the hiring process and with successful employment.

The college's new approach to employment coaching combines employer information, employment preparation and support services throughout the HPOG participant experience, including:

- **Outreach Events and Student Intake Process:** As Reina Ravago, PCC's Outreach Advanced Program Coordinator, describes, "employment is discussed in the very first slide at the information session. We discuss that HPOG is a well-rounded program where they receive ongoing education and employment supports. We explain that we start to prepare them early on for employment to include resume-building, interviewing, professional development, etc...that they (the students) have this support throughout their entire journey so they are well prepared when they start looking for work post-training completion."

- **Employability Class:** PCC's workforce agency partner, The Pima County One Stop, conducts a four day workshop at the beginning of the HPOG student experience. It helps participants assess their interests in various occupations, and begin building their portfolio of materials for a successful job search. The students' portfolio includes a resume, master application, cover letter, and references. All HPOG HOPES students are required to participate in this class unless waived by their HPOG HOPES advisor or Pima County One Stop case manager for special cases. Those who may receive waivers include participants who are already employed in entry-level health care jobs, or who applied to HPOG HOPES after enrolling in a health care training program.
- **Employment Coaching:** The HPOG HOPES employment coaches support their caseload of students-by helping them make an informed decision on an occupational goal that matches their skills, values, and interests. They then direct participants to a corresponding program of study to acquire new skills and credentials for this occupation. During training, employment coaches continue working with students to address any barriers that threaten to slow their progress. They also continue refining students' efforts towards achieving a specific employment outcome within their chosen occupational field of study. Initially, a coach will meet with the student right after random assignment and provide a list of items needed to be accepted into their program. These can include obtaining a fingerprint clearance card, meeting with their One Stop Workforce Development Specialist, taking the college placement test, attending information sessions for their training program of interest, and obtaining required immunizations. HPOG HOPES coaches meet with new students at least once a month while they are preparing to start a healthcare training program, either in-person, via email, or over the phone.

### Performance Support Tools for HPOG Staff and Participants

To support the HPOG HOPES coaching team's employment-focused advising with their students, Suzi Shoemaker and the HPOG HOPES Employment Specialist, Carmen Carlson, developed an extensive employment toolkit that incorporates what they learned from employers. The toolkit documents are available in a shared Gooledocs for all HPOG HOPES coaches to use with their participants. The toolkit contains presentations on topics such as: interviewing skills, resume development, and targeted health care career cover letters. There is a checklist to ensure that a participant has easy access to all of the information needed for a successful job search. Another tool is a professional dress manual with specific guidance on what to wear and not wear to interviews, along with a referral form for a local nonprofit clothing bank where participants can acquire professional clothes for interviews.

In addition to these industry-specific tools, the HPOG HOPES staff can also access many program-specific tools, such as occupation-specific cover letter templates, resume formats and examples, and sample job descriptions for the occupation. There is also a list of volunteer opportunities with over 50 area employers where students can gain experience needed to successfully compete for health care jobs requiring some prior experience (especially in the medical office field). The appendix for this case study has a description of Pima Community College's employment toolkit, and contact information for fellow HPOG grantees to request copies of specific tools to adapt for their programs.

## An Unconventional Employer Engagement Example

How does Pima Community College's employer engagement approach play out with specific employer partners? One example with an atypical employer illustrates HPOG HOPES' process in managing relationships. Nancy James is a Talent Acquisition Specialist for Corizon Health, an organization that provides health care services in prisons for incarcerated individuals. She was referred to Suzi Shoemaker by a PCC colleague for an introductory discussion. The first phone conversation between Shoemaker and James was 90 minutes long. In it, James shared details about the prison's philosophy of care, working conditions, ideal candidate fit, and more. During the call, Shoemaker learned that LPN jobs at Corizon Health paid higher than average starting wages for LPNs, had strong benefits, and attractive shift schedules that matched many HPOG HOPES participants' scheduling preferences. As the relationship has progressed since this first conversation, James has participated in four LPN job fairs at the college, and hired over seven HPOG HOPES participants for LPN roles. Shoemaker conducted several post-employment interviews with graduates hired by Corizon, and gathered "very strong" reports of a safe and supportive work environment, with opportunities for continual professional development. Many students have mentioned that the diversity of expertise they gain through this employment is most invaluable and has assisted them in identifying a specialty they wish to focus upon. Nancy James has become such a champion of HPOG partnerships that she was interviewed on camera for [HPOG's 2017 Employer Engagement video](#) that describes examples of effective partnerships between HPOG and employers.

## Indicators Affirming Results from Pima Community College's Approach

The new HPOG HOPES program management mindset shifted the previous linear approach to participant service where training was at the beginning of a student's journey and employment at the end. In the new model, employment is a central focus within each phase of participant experience, driving all service activities. As the college's HPOG HOPES Program Manager, Angie Sytsma, remarked: "Employment is the flywheel that drives all activities and interventions of our HPOG program. We are closing the traditional divide between academic training and meaningful employment achievements." In the two years since beginning its program assessment process, Pima Community College's HPOG HOPES program staff has observed how this approach is contributing to stronger results:

- **Employment Outcomes:** Pima Community College's HPOG HOPES participants' first time health care employment results exceed the targeted goal. Within the targeted programs, the majority of employed participants are hired by employers that have actively engaged with the HPOG HOPES employment team.
- **Employer Engagement:** The overall number of employers that engage with the targeted training programs has roughly doubled; nearly all employers continue participating in subsequent job fairs; other employers have begun contacting the college about participating.
- **Coaching Effectiveness:** The college has embedded its knowledge of employer practices into an extensive array of tools that are used throughout the participant experience by its coaches. HPOG HOPES coach, Andrea Anduaga, summarized her role as follows. "As an HPOG coach, we fill the role of navigator that involves working with our students from HPOG random assignment to a program of study entrance to graduation to employment. Having toolkit materials, like our Employment Toolkit, allows for information at our fingertips and creates more efficiency in our

roles. This has also triggered similar information sharing in other areas, such as program advising and student success handouts. This [toolkit] allows for coaches to spend more time with and on our students.”

- **Participant Engagement:** After completing training, HPOG HOPES participants are largely responsive to requests for employment update information, and employers are also willing to share employment verification information about HPOG HOPES participants. (Note: Participating employers are made aware of the college’s standard practice of obtaining signed releases by participants to permit such sharing of information.) Students are also receptive to requests from staff to help interview future HPOG HOPES applicants. Completing the circle of a successful relationship, a few former HPOG students have taken part in employer panels to share their experiences with groups of new participants.

## **Planning Questions to Guide a Results-Driven Program Assessment Process**

Other HPOG grantees who are interested in a similar program assessment approach can consider a number of planning questions to help inform their strategy.

- **Determine Focus for Program Assessments:** Which training programs with significant enrollments by HPOG participants already have high employment outcomes, and don’t need a program review? Which training programs have the largest gap in employment outcomes by HPOG participants? Which programs lack a natural employment onboarding process such as a clinical experience with employers, or have an under-utilized network of clinical employer sites?
- **Build Alliances with Targeted Program Management Colleagues:** Who makes program management decisions for the targeted training program(s), and what benefits might they realize by participating in a program assessment process? Do they demonstrate an interest in engaging with HPOG in conducting a review, sharing employer contacts, and supporting outreach to past program participants to discuss their experiences? Do you have confidence that they will be willing to make program changes based on findings with employers?
- **Assess and Engage the HPOG Case Management Staff:** What is the level of comfort among current HPOG coaches/case managers in discussing employment goals with HPOG participants and providing specific employment guidance? In what ways can the program better equip and prepare the HPOG case management staff to strengthen their capabilities to support participants in preparing to compete successfully for jobs within their targeted occupations?
- **Focus on Most Valuable Employers:** Based on regional labor market data, which area employers appear to have consistent hiring demand for the targeted health care programs and occupation(s)? Which have more convenient locations, better-quality career opportunities, and more supportive working environments for HPOG participants? Which prospective employers do you already have supportive relationships with and access to?



## Appendix – Descriptions of Tools Used by Pima Community College

This case study referenced numerous tools developed by the PCC HPOG employment team based on its program assessments and employer information-gathering. HPOG programs interested in any of the tools described below can contact Suzi Shoemaker, Employment Advanced Program Coordinator, at 520-206-5250 or [spschoemaker@pima.edu](mailto:spschoemaker@pima.edu). The request should identify the specific tool(s) of interest using the titles listed below. Keep in mind that these tools were developed specifically based on employer needs in Pima Community College's service area, and should be carefully reviewed and adapted for other employment markets and operating environments.

**Coach Employment Academy Guide:** This 25-page guide orients and trains employment coaches for PCC HPOG HOPES. The guide has basic information on the college's HPOG program and recommended processes for effective coaching, and incorporates many of the participant tools listed below.

**Checklists to Run Successful Job Search:** This participant checklist lists 14 items that are necessary for their job search. The list includes fingerprint clearance card, state occupational licenses, personal documentation such as a social security card, citizenship ID, etc. The remainder of the document has space for participants to record information that they will need to complete online applications and to include in their resumes.

**Professional Dress for Job Search:** This tool lists "Do's" and "Don'ts" on appropriate dress for men and women to wear for interviews or other professional events. The description includes pictures of professional clothing, and suggests specific Tucson-area nonprofit/second hand stores to acquire professional clothing at low cost.

**Cover Letter Workshop PowerPoint Presentation:** This 12-slide presentation outlines a detailed 5-step process for writing an effective cover letter.

**Interview Folder with Program Specific Interview Questions:** This folder includes position-specific interview questions created for each of the HPOG healthcare training programs supported at Pima Community College. The folder also includes the "20 Most Asked" interview questions with sample answers, and a fill-in-the-blank "Tell Me About Yourself" handout to help students develop their answer to that question.

**Interviewing Skills Workshop PowerPoint Presentation:** This 26-slide presentation contains best practices and recommendations for how to succeed at a job interview. For example, the presentation includes tips for how to dress, frequently-asked questions for which to plan responses, a recommended format for answering interview questions, how to prepare for an interview, sample questions to ask (or not to ask), and links to other interviewing resources.

**Resume Development PowerPoint Presentation:** This 24-slide presentation discusses how to develop strong resumes. It includes an overview on the purposes of a resume, information about resume screening software used by employers, how to break down targeted job description to include key skills on one's resume, and examples of a recommended resume format and content.

**Resume Workshop Handout Folder:** This folder includes several handouts used in resume development workshops in conjunction with the presentation above. Handouts include sample resumes, and directions on using online resume builders, etc.

**Mock Interview Scoring Rubric:** This guide is intended as a “grading” rubric to assess mock interviews and provide useful feedback to participants. The scoring rubric lists competencies in six areas, such as first impressions, attitude, quality of responses, etc. Within each competency area are three levels of ratings that each have specific descriptions of behaviors observed. The bottom rating level says “needs work,” and the top rating level says “you’re hired!”

**Sample Job Descriptions:** These job descriptions are used to guide participants in developing position-specific resumes and job applications. This file includes sample job descriptions for targeted health care jobs, including CNA, Medical Assistant, Phlebotomist, Surgical Technician, etc.

**Occupational Training Program Files:** This resource has program-specific files for 18 different health care occupations. Each file includes an overview of PCC’s training program for that occupation, along with a career specific cover letter/resume template, and employment history worksheet.

**Occupational Skill Sets:** This file includes information from the O\*Net U.S. Department of Labor website, as well as information from the Pima Community College program website, describing skills and tools used for 14 occupations targeted by the HPOG HOPES program.