



ALTERNATIVE STAFFING ALLIANCE

People-Based, Market-Driven

Alternative Staffing Sector At-A-Glance

Alternative staffing organizations (ASOs) identify labor market opportunities and help low-skilled, unemployed and disadvantaged individuals access them by making temporary and temp-to-perm job placements on a competitive, fee-for-service basis.

- ASOs serve a broad base of low-income jobseekers with obstacles to employment. People with disabilities, ex-offenders and homeless individuals are major target populations.
- ASOs are located primarily in urban centers, and provide staffing services within their local metro area markets.
- Most ASOs are organized as in-house programs or subsidiaries of nonprofit parent organizations.
- Intensive pre- and post-placement supports for workers distinguish ASOs from conventional staffing suppliers. Job coaching, case management, social service referrals (for child care, housing, health insurance, etc.), transportation, and supplying tools and work clothing are the most prevalent types of support.
- Temporary and temp-to-perm staffing are core business services offered by all ASOs. Some ASOs also offer additional services including direct placements, on-site coaching and managed work crews.
- Jobseekers are primarily placed in entry-level office/clerical and warehouse/ industrial positions. Some ASOs also supply higher-skilled workers.
- Individual ASOs place from 35 to over 2,000 persons per year. An average size ASO places 300 to 500 persons annually.
- Established ASOs cover at least 75% of their program expenses with fee revenues, and some generate an operating surplus. Earning fees from employers for worker recruitment, screening and retention services makes ASOs more cost-effective than traditional nonprofit job placement programs and less reliant on government funding and charitable support.
- Approximately 50 practitioner organizations comprise the alternative staffing sector in the US and Canada.
- The oldest ASOs began operating in the 1970s and 80s and now post annual billings in the millions of dollars. Many ASOs are at least a decade old, and were launched in the late 90's following welfare reform and during a period of low unemployment that favored market entry. New practitioners continue to enter the field as workforce development professionals become increasingly aware of this sustainable transitional jobs strategy.

Advantages of Alternative Staffing

Alternative staffing organizations (ASOs) deliver value to their customers, promote workplace success for people with obstacles to employment and raise standards for sourcing entry-level workers. The model's market-based approach leverages charitable support with fees charged to employers, making it a highly cost effective and sustainable workforce development strategy.

ASOs deliver high value to employer customers

- ASOs are specialists in effectively placing and supporting disadvantaged workers.
- ASOs understand the challenges of their target populations and how to effectively address them.
- ASOs provide employees with comprehensive supports that promote worker retention and individual development.

ASOs deliver high returns to charitable foundations and government agencies that invest in them

- Fee revenues generally cover at least 75% of an ASO's operating costs, efficiently leveraging grant investments.
- Fee revenues lower the average cost per jobseeker served compared with other transitional employment models.

ASOs are an effective, sustainable workforce development strategy

- Temporary staffing is the fastest growing segment of the workforce and a key pathway to employment. Over half of all employers use temp staffing agencies to find good permanent workers.
- ASOs are highly responsive and adaptive to changes in their markets.
- Temporary job assignments offer jobseekers an effective way to build their resume, develop job skills and self-confidence, and experience an occupation or work environment while demonstrating their reliability and value to potential employers.
- ASOs offer part-time jobs for individuals who want to enroll in education and training programs to improve their longer-term employment prospects.
- As competitive staffing suppliers, ASOs receive candid feedback from customers about employees' performance and use this information to help individuals develop appropriate workforce skills and behaviors.
- ASOs provide comprehensive supports to help individuals with barriers to employment obtain jobs and skills needed for upward mobility and permanent job placement.

ASOs help to raise standards of staffing industry practice

- In fulfilling job orders, ASOs consider the mutual interests of both workers and employers.
- ASOs discourage unfair treatment of vulnerable or disenfranchised workers.
- ASOs demonstrate to employers that worker-focused staffing is a high-value option, especially for sourcing entry-level workers.



ALTERNATIVE STAFFING ALLIANCE

People-Based, Market-Driven

Success Story: Walter “Ryan” Johnston, Primavera Works, Tucson, Arizona

While serving his prison sentence, Ryan Johnston met another inmate, a chef who had cooked for over 23 years. Ryan took advantage of this time and learned as much as he could about cooking. Upon release from prison, Ryan found it difficult to acclimate to life outside. He eventually made his way back to Tucson and moved into a homeless shelter.

Ryan tried various employment programs but found they could not relate to his situation and offered only low-paying jobs with no opportunity for advancement. Ryan also says that he had “a very bad attitude” and didn't trust people. Shelter staff told him about Primavera Works, and while skeptical, he decided to give the organization a try. He was surprised to find the staff receptive – they were “there to help build me up, not tear me down” – and they slowly earned his trust.

Primavera encouraged Ryan, who said he was determined to “get back on my feet and make it work.” His first temporary job was in maintenance for a landscaping company, followed by demolition work for an environmental firm at the Air Force base. Aware of his cooking skills, Primavera called one day to say there was a temporary position available at a local restaurant. Ryan knew this was his calling and immediately took the position.

Ryan's cooking is so good that some customers only come to the restaurant when he is working and customers often send tips back to the kitchen for him. Ryan's supervisor told him “you're going to be here quite a while.” Ryan is now permanently employed at the restaurant and was recently honored as employee of the week. The money he has earned has allowed Ryan to move out of the shelter and into his own apartment. He looks forward to the future and to furthering his cooking career.

Ryan credits Primavera with helping him to get over his negative attitude and giving him the opportunity to work. He says that the staff believed in him and provided that “needed nudge” to guide him towards what he really enjoys doing, cooking. “Just because you were in prison doesn't mean you're not worth anything. Primavera gives you the tools to go out there and do what you need to do.”

Success Story: Thomasina Olaniyi-oke, Goodwill Temporary Services, Austin, Texas

When Thomasina Olaniyi-Oke moved to Austin in 1992, she had been out of the workforce for two years due to personal and health issues related to asthma and multiple sclerosis. After recovering from these health problems, she returned to the workforce in 1993 until her layoff in 2001, a consequence of the dot-com bust. With a Master's degree in Library Science and significant work experience, Thomasina was anxious to find challenging, meaningful work.

Thomasina learned about Goodwill Temporary Services from her oldest daughter, who had used the agency's services. Her first reaction was that Goodwill was only for people with serious disabilities. She tried several staffing agencies but felt that Goodwill offered the best opportunity for long-term temporary employment. She also liked the idea of working for a state agency and considered Goodwill's numerous government contracts an added benefit. Goodwill's staff, she found, was very professional and receptive.

Her first assignment, in March 2003, was with the State of Texas Attorney General's Office to develop an employer database in preparation for a large-scale child support collection initiative. Thomasina excelled in this position. When the project ended, she went on to work in temporary positions for several state agencies, including the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Department on Aging, gaining valuable work experience.

In the summer of 2004, the Attorney General's Office recruited Thomasina to supervise the second phase of the child support collection initiative. Initially hired as a temporary team leader, she was promoted to temporary manager within a few months. Six months later, her success in this role led to a full-time temporary position as project manager and the assignment was extended for nearly two years. Thomasina hand-picked her team – 15 to 35 people over the duration of the project and all Goodwill temporary staffers with whom she had previously worked. Thomasina cites her staff's willingness to work hard and Goodwill's support as keys to her success. "I loved it when Goodwill brought in a case worker to help my staff with personal issues." When the project was completed, Thomasina was hired by the Division of Worker's Compensation, where she now works in Business Process Improvement and oversees reporting for all performance measures for the division's 900 employees.

Thomasina believes Goodwill Temporary Services is a terrific alternative to traditional staffing agencies as it allows you to gain experience and prove yourself on the job. "If you have a positive attitude and really want to work – even if you have an illness, face a barrier to employment or have not worked in a while – Goodwill is a great place to go. They work with people of all age ranges and backgrounds, with all kinds of issues. As long as you are open to working with them, they are open to working with you."

In 2006, Thomasina was honored as Employee of the Year by the Texas Association of Staffing. She states, "I really count myself blessed when it comes to my job now." She knows she can always count on Goodwill, however. "If something happened to me and I didn't have a permanent job, Goodwill is the first place I would go."

Success Story: Peter Dinh, HIRED Temps, Santa Clara, California

In Santa Clara, California, HIRED Temps has placed over 50 people with disabilities – ranging from hearing impairment to spinal cord injuries, chronic illness to mental health issues – in temporary positions from entry to executive levels. Support services are also available, including skills assessment, career counseling and computer training, to help job seekers succeed.

Peter Dinh discovered HIRED Temps when he went to pick up his dry cleaning. HIRED Temps was next door to the dry cleaners, and thinking it was a traditional temp agency, he went inside. The woman he spoke with explained what the organization offered and Peter, who was born with cerebral palsy, felt it was a good fit for him. He said that he had “lost hope” as a young person but that HIRED Temps restored that hope. Peter learned about Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations and enhanced his interviewing skills through HIRED Temps.

He then built an impressive resume working for companies including VMWare and Genentech, where he worked as an administrative coordinator in logistics training. Peter recently turned down a job offer, and proudly notes, “I never had the opportunity to do that before. It was a little victory from when I first came to HIRED Temps and was begging for work.”

HIRED Temps Program Director Monica Makela says that the disabled population represents a great untapped labor pool. “Oftentimes, our temps are more productive and creative because of the issues they face on the job.” Makela, who believes the issue of diversity is the ‘elephant in the room,’ has noticed a trend in recent years of more hiring managers learning to think more broadly and expanding their definition of a diverse workplace to include people with disabilities.

Peter, whose family immigrated to the US from Vietnam in 1980, is happy with his current life situation and enjoys his work. His next goal, with the help of HIRED Temps, is to find a full-time position and further advance his career.

Success Story: Sandra and Carrie Schwieger, Galt Foundation Temporary Staffing Services, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Sandra Schwieger and her daughter Carrie, have both experienced the confidence-building power of alternative staffing first-hand. Although she had 40 years of work experience, Sandra, who has diabetes and heart issues, encountered discrimination in her job search, including one prospective employer who told her she “wasn't front office material.” Sandra said that people were afraid to take a chance on her – “they were afraid I might fall off my chair while typing.”

Sandra was introduced to Galt Foundation Temporary Staffing Services in Oklahoma City in 2002. Feeling very disheartened, Sandra said she received a warm welcome from the Galt staff, who “have a heart for people with two or three strikes against them.” After gaining experience through Galt as an administrative assistant, Sandra became a temporary employee at the Oklahoma State Employees Group Insurance Board. Sandra finished her first assignment – contacting retired state employees to update their contact information – three days prior to the 90-day deadline.

Director of Oklahoma Operations Judy Atkins says it is the personal relationship Galt fosters that delivers exceptional results. “We know the caliber of work our candidates are capable of and employers know they are getting a highly qualified individual.” Privacy issues are also respected. “Each applicant's disability is private information and only if there's a particular accommodation that an employer needs to make, do they know about the person's disability.”

When Sandra's daughter Carrie Schwieger, who has spinal bifida, was laid off from her job, Sandra recommended Galt. Carrie recalls “I went to several traditional temp agencies, where I was just a number. Galt staff make you feel comfortable and help you improve your qualifications and skills.” Both Carrie and her mom are now employed in full-time state positions. Carrie works for the Oklahoma Real Estate Commission, where she started as the front desk receptionist and has since been promoted to real estate exam coordinator.

Marti Sawyer, the contracting officer who oversees Galt's contract with the State of Oklahoma, believes strongly in the value of alternative staffing. “Temporary staffing is a great way to employ people with disabilities. It is one of the most rewarding programs I have ever been involved with.”

Alternative staffing organizations are playing a key role in creating opportunities for people with disabilities to enter into and succeed in the labor market. In the words of Sandra Schwieger, “alternative staffing opens doors that are closed to you and provides the chance to prove yourself. It puts people first, not your disability.”