

## MWCA Best Practices

WIB Name/WSA: Stearns-Benton Workforce Council/Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council  
Submitted by: Linda Platz, Chairperson and Kathy Zavala, Executive Director

Stearns-Benton built on the Workforce “U” model highlighted by DVD in January 2007. Stearns-Benton continues development of this model through:

- A. Expansion of Workforce “U” to the WWW at [www.workforceu.com](http://www.workforceu.com)
- B. Expansion of Workforce “U” to provide “Breakfast with the B.E.S.T.”

**Overview of Workforce “U”** Jobseeker and employer impact, community impact, identification of those involved, including collaborators, leveraging/alignment of outside resources, ideas for replication/lessons learned.

The purpose of Workforce “U” is to build community capacity in economic development, and to meet the workforce needs of business and jobseekers, building prosperity by acquiring, advancing and transferring skills in strategic industries.

Workforce “U” provides a framework and a language that is understood by employers and job seekers (students). It integrates the assessment, career exploration, labor market information, career counseling, training and placement activities that are common to our WorkForce Centers and so difficult to explain. Benchmarks and standards (credentials) are identified that result in a value-added referral of a student (jobseeker) to an employer.

Workforce “U” also integrates community resources in preparing our regional workforce. Faculty include SBETC staff, area employers, and area organizations who offer their services as “classes”.

Those who attend Workforce “U” investigate the career pathway of a strategic industry to determine if it is suitable and if the student (jobseeker) can meet employer needs and expectations by participating in skills assessment, career exploration, and short-term/long-term training. Courses are offered at 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 levels. Classes at the 400 and 500 levels are offered in partnership with post-secondary institutions including the St. Cloud Technical College and St. Cloud State University. Each course has employer-identified prerequisites, purposes, outcomes, competency standards and measurements, which enable the student to demonstrate job readiness.

Workforce “U” students currently include job seekers/students who are unemployed, underemployed, emerging and returning to the workforce. Students include immigrants, older workers, youth, dislocated workers, public assistance recipients, people with disabilities. Program/model evaluation and change are on-going.

- A. Expansion of Workforce “U” to the web.

Employers participating as advisors and faculty in Workforce “U” moved the model to the next step – a dedicated website, with the purpose being the building of a **system of excellence**. Launched in January, 2008, the website provides a level of service to employers, students and members of the public. The goal is that the homepage of choice for the many regional partners, current and future.

Stage 1 of development focused on the employer page, providing a single resource for current labor market information, business resources, training opportunities and opportunities for connecting with regional partnerships. The Stearns-Benton Workforce Council uses this tool to broadcast its workplan and to report progress on initiatives.

The focus on the employer page for Stage 1 represents the focus on employers as key in the success of Workforce “U” in being of value to students and area employers. Employers serve as adjunct professors, and will be using this website to link their home hiring pages with [www.workforceu.com](http://www.workforceu.com) for the benefit of student/job seeker hiring opportunities.

Stage 2 of development will focus on the student pages with a student data management system and e-commerce.

Stage 3 will focus on e-learning opportunities.

#### B. Breakfast with the B.E.S.T. (Building Excellence through Strategic Thinking)

Advertised on the webpage, this new offering was developed by key employers who are on the Workforce Council (WIB). This monthly breakfast training series targeting employers is taught by known business leaders from the community on topics determined of highest value by the Workforce “U” Advisory Committee of employers. Presenters are recognized as leaders in their topic areas. These presenters are offering their services as a method of “giving back” and growing community prosperity. Beginning topics include:

- “Improving Your Human Capital”, Dr. Bruce Miles, CEO, Big River Consulting Group LLC
- “ABC’s of Benefit Planning”, David Flouton, Attorney, Associated Financial Group
- “World Class Safety Program”, Boyd Hengel, Safety and Health Coordinator, Bayer Built Inc.
- “Continuous Quality Improvement”, T. Kent Gilmore, C.O.O., Nahan Printing, Inc.
- “Talent Management”, Nancy Myers, Professional Development Community Manager, The Bernick Companies
- “Creating a Culture of Leadership”, Tom Schlough, C.E.O., Park Industries
- “How To Protect Your Business from Technology Threats”, John Justin, Community Service Officer, St. Cloud Police Department
- “Social Capital”, Brian Myers, Head of Midwest Operations, ING Direct
- “Building a Start-Up Business”, Justin Wampach, C.E.O., Adjuvant