

MWCA Best Practices

WIB Name/WSA: Joint submittal - Ramsey + Washington + Dakota/Scott
Submitted by Robert Crawford, Patricia Brady, Mary Jo Gardner, Mark Jacobs

- **Overview describing the innovative best practice**

The Workforce Investment Boards of Ramsey, Washington and Dakota-Scott counties held a joint, half-day meeting on Friday, June 13th at the Northern Service Center in Dakota County. The meeting, conceptualized and organized by the chairs of the three WIBs, had approximately 60 attendees including numerous county commissioners.

The meeting was facilitated by Tim Walsh, Director of Community Services for Scott County. The goals for the meeting included:

- Understand current economic realities and projections in the Tri-WIB area
- Interact with a panel of experts to discuss business, education, labor market and demographic changes facing you in the future
- Brainstorm possibilities with fellow Tri-WIB members
- Envision proactive possibilities for a Tri-WIB collaboration

After the presentations, the attendees worked in small groups to identify:

1. What are the top workforce issues you are currently facing?
2. What are the top three workforce issues you will face in the next 1-5 years?
3. What workforce issue would you like to see the Tri-WIB address in the next year? How?

The leadership of the three WIB's will review the answers to what the group would like to see the Tri-WIB focus on, and determine next steps.

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

For job seekers the immediate impact was the group-wide discussion on key issues facing WIB members across the area and the identification of areas to work on together. Concern about the lack of skills (soft-skills; technical skills; basic skills) and the need for action to address these issues was a key concern and identified as one of the top three issues the Tri-WIB should look at.

Attendees focused discussion on concerns about the labor pool over the next five years including the aging workforce, the emerging workforce, the diverse workforce, and those re-entering the workforce. Part of the benefit of the identification and discussion of the issues will be in what evolves as the priority action when the organizers meet. Immediate value is the shared dialogue and education of peers on the significant issues facing employers.

- **Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)**

Event organizers ensured tables had representatives from each WIB – but not state or WIB staff – so the discussion would be truly WIB-member driven. Attendees were engaged as they discussed and identified answers to: “top issues facing you now;” “top issues facing you in five years” and “what should Tri-WIB focus on?”

The results for the top *current* and *1-5 year* issues were related to: skills, youth; policy; business-assistance; and labor pool. As for the question “what should the Tri-WIB focus on” -

12 different ideas were identified. Attendees then selected their top three issues. After the votes were tabulated, the top three were: a) Youth – mentorship, apprenticeship, share respective strategies and commonalities; b) Organic/grass-roots regionalism – awareness of common threads, common opportunities tied to key industry and c) the gap between what businesses need and the skills of available workforce.

The presence of numerous county commissioners was valuable not only for their insights and engagement but the opportunity for them to hear and learn about the significant workforce challenges moving forward.

- **Identification of those involved, including collaborators**

The Tri-Wib meeting originated from a meeting of the Chairs and directors of the three Workforce Service Areas. As the group discussed potential ideas for what the WIBs might collaborate on, they realized a meeting involving all of the members would be the best way to get input and engagement. The planning team included: Cathy Weik, WIB Chair, Dakota-Scott; Paul Nelson, Chair, Ramsey; and Brenda Carlson, Chair of Washington. Staff involved included: Robert Crawford and Rachel O'Connell, Washington; Patricia Brady and Mary Jo Gardner, Ramsey; and Mark Jacobs, Dakota-Scott. Additionally, other staff was essential for coordinating and taking care of the multitude of details vital to hosting an event.

- **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources**

One of the most popular components of the morning was the panelists' insights. The group included an impressive cast including:

- Bill Blazar, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
- Rachel Hillman, Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Martha McMurray, State Demographer's Office
- Mark Misukanis, Minnesota Office of Higher Education
- Keith Ryskoski, Superintendent of Stillwater Area Public Schools

Each panelist had approximately 10 minutes to provide an overview of what their organization sees as significant current and future issues. The perspectives and interchange were fascinating.

Additionally, U.S. Congresswoman Betty McCollum also appeared and spoke about a) the need for a highly-skilled workforce, b) the challenges of the present and future; c) and her need for WIB member help in the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.

- **Ideas for replication/lessons learned:**

The event itself is quite replicable and gauging from the post-event survey is worth doing. Overall, response from attendees indicated the event achieved its four goals. Twenty out of twenty-four respondents gave the event a score of 7 or higher (scale of 1-10), on the question of "overall, how valuable was the event for you?"

Key components in developing and holding the event included:

- A geographical area with logical geographic, industry, and social connections
- Dedication and leadership of WIB chairs
- Advance promotion of the event with WIB chairs urging attendance
- A respected, varied and expert group of panelists.
- A skilled facilitator to lead the discussions.