



SUBMISSION FORM

WIB Name/WSA Anoka County
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- **Overview of innovative best practice**

In the fall of 2008, the WorkForce Center (WFC) in Blaine started to experience a steady increase in customer demand and by early January staff realized that current business processes and service offerings were not meeting growing customer service needs. It was evident from the traffic pattern that a new service response was required by the WorkForce in order to meet the growing needs of customers and in particular dislocated workers. Some of the job search workshop registrations were backed up 4 weeks and customers interested in dislocated worker services were waiting 6-8 weeks to get connected to dislocated worker services.

As a result of the increase in customer demand, WFC staff in collaboration with community partners, developed new strategies to address the employment and training needs of our WFC customers. We worked collaboratively to find solutions that would reduce the significant waiting period for dislocated workers to access dislocated worker program services, minimize the registration time for job search and career exploration classes and eliminate long lines to use the computers in the resource room.

The WorkForce Center partners have successfully implemented the following service strategies that have proven to be effective in minimizing waiting periods to access needed services.

1. Established a collaborative work team in early January to redesign the referral and intake processes for the dislocated worker program. As part of this effort the Job Training Center hired an additional employee who later was hired as one of the DEED RES staff. This early hire allowed for the team to design a WorkForce Center Orientation which was in place by February. Members of this team included state and county staff working together to develop the power point, handouts and facilitation guide.

Four orientations are held on a weekly basis to ensure that UI claimants and other interested customers can regularly access these informative sessions and register for the various service offerings including the dislocated worker program. As a result of this redesign, the waiting list for the dislocated worker program was eliminated. Individuals attending a WorkForce Center Information Session are referred to the very next Focus Forward Dislocated Worker Workshop. Between March 9 and July 16 a total of 713 individuals have attended a WFC orientation.

2. Expanded WFC business hours; Open 7:30 am Monday through Friday (30 minutes earlier) and until 6:30 pm Monday through Thursday and added 12 more computers for job search.
3. Expanded the universal workshops by leveraging community partnerships. Anoka Ramsey Community College provided space and instructors at no charge to facilitate several computer training classes and provided staff to assist at the WFC. In addition, on a contractual arrangement, the college provided career exploration classes at the college utilizing curriculum developed by the Job Training Center.

Anoka Technical College (ATC) worked with WFC leadership in exploring ways to enhance their course offerings to meet dislocated worker needs. As a result of this effort, the ATC implemented the Next STEP program which is a fast, focused, flexible educational pathway for dislocated workers and other adults seeking career and retraining opportunities. It is a unique partnership with area WFCs that aligns college programs and services with WFC outreach efforts to create seamless educational opportunities.

4. Metro North Adult Basic Education provides 16 hours a month of instruction for several basic computer classes. These classes focus on skill development for customers needing to build their computer literacy in order to do a computer based job search.

- **Jobseeker impact**

As a result of these overall efforts, customers do not have waiting periods to access services. Customers are immediately referred to a WorkForce Center Orientation session and there is no longer a waiting period to access the Focus Forward Dislocated Worker workshop. In addition, registrations for all core workshop offerings are keeping pace with customer demand. If these changes were not put in place, customers would be waiting two months or more to get into the dislocated worker program and it would be 30 or more days to access job seeking and career exploration classes.

It is without question the Anoka County WFC has been able to provide services to more job seekers in our community. Without making significant changes to our business processes it would have been difficult to deliver timely services to the volume of job seekers in our area. The numbers of customer visits to this center were at 5,171 in September 2008, by March 2009 the number of visits increased to 7,788 and in June it was at a high of 8,858.

- **Community Impact**

The Workforce Council members were made aware of the pressing need for expanded services in Anoka County. It was during council meetings that several partners expressed an interest in working with WFC management in designing a solution. They contributed in multiple ways and were committed to being part of the solution. It was without hesitation that members came forward to express how their organization could partner with the WFC in enhancing core service offerings. The direct beneficiaries of this collaboration are the job seekers in our community who are challenged with finding new employment during this increasingly difficult job market.

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

Representatives from DEED, Anoka Technical College, Anoka Ramsey Community College, Metro North Adult Basic Education, Anoka County Community Action Program and Anoka County Job Training Center are key collaborators of this effort and will continue to play an active role in delivering services in the Anoka County Workforce Service Area.

- **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources**

There are multiple examples of how resources have come together to implement and sustain the strategies that have been outlined in this effort. Metro North Adult Basic Education provides the instruction for the computer classes that are delivered at the WFC and at Anoka Ramsey Community College. Registrations for these workshops are managed through the WFC resource room staff. Anoka Ramsey Community College provides space and instructors and Anoka Technical College provided time and resources in developing their Next Step program. The Job Training Center allocated a large percentage of the WIA Adult funding to support the resource room staffing and instruction for career exploration workshops. DEED provided extra staffing for the resource room as well as the job search workshops and Anoka County Community Action Program provided a special grant to cover the costs for the expansion of evening hours.

- **Ideas for replication/lessons learned**

Growing WFC service demands in this current economy required collaborative partnerships that allow for the partners to leverage resources and staffing expertise. Once partners were at the table, creative solutions were readily identified and new processes were developed. It is also critical to take the time to analyze current business processes and practices and to recognize that this is a different business environment requiring new approaches. This upfront process requires time and commitment but the end result will be an improved service model that is more responsive to the customers.