

Aligning Strategies, Resources and Expertise to Address Workforce Development Issues in Key Regional Industries

Overview:

The labor market in South Central Minnesota is characterized by a solid, diverse industry base built largely on manufacturing and health care/social assistance. Manufacturing employs more people in the region than any other sector – more than 21,500 jobs or one in five jobs in the region. Health Care/Social Assistance comes in second, employing over 17,000 individuals. *The South Central WorkForce Council, working in consort with local employers and partners, have aligned strategies, resources and expertise to attract and prepare a skilled workforce for these two key regional industries.*

The first phase of our strategies is to focus on awareness. This is especially important for the manufacturing industry where old stereo-types need to be addressed, and for both industries, where awareness of new career opportunities in the industry is important. We have developed four strategies to increase awareness:

1. Provide *Career Exploration* workshops monthly at each Workforce Center where the public (universal customer) can match demand occupations in the key industries to their interest areas, skills and abilities.
2. Through our *Partners in Career Exploration* Program we are placing college interns from MSU –Mankato at nine local school districts to provide career information on demand occupations in the key industries to 9th through 12th graders. In addition, we include field trips to area businesses as part of the Summer Youth Program to expose youth to key industries and demand occupations in the region.
3. All enrollees in WIA and Dislocated Worker programs receive information on demand occupations in key industries to enable them to match their interests, skills, and abilities to jobs in demand.
4. Implementing a best practice from last year's MWCA meeting, we are working with local partners to conduct a Tour of Manufacturing in SC Minnesota. Manufacturers from across the region will host an "open house" in conjunction with Manufacturers' Week to enable the general public to tour their facilities, learn about what products are being produced, and job opportunities available.

The second phase is to prepare low skilled workers for career opportunities within the two key industries in the region. Employers indicate that many job applicants lack work readiness and the basic skills necessary to succeed in employment. Strategies to address the lack of basic/work readiness skills include:

- Implementing the Work Keys National Career Readiness Assessment, the National Work Readiness Credential and the Learning Web to prepare job seekers with the basic skills necessary to succeed in employment.
- FastTRAC programming in: Pre-Manufacturing, Pre-Welding, Pre-CNA, and Pre-Health Care to provide an opportunity for low skilled/low wage job seekers to explore careers in manufacturing and health care, as well as obtain the basic skills and credential necessary to compete for and succeed in entry level employment in manufacturing and health care.

The third phase is to build the capacity of South Central College to deliver the training necessary to provide a skilled, technically trained workforce. The region has received two Department of Labor Community Based Job Training Grants to build the capacity of SC College to provide new degree, diploma and certificate programs of study for the manufacturing and health care industries. New

programs include: Mechatronics, Pharmacy Technician, Medical Assistant, and Radiography Technicians.

Job Seeker Impact:

The benefits of this comprehensive approach is that job seekers are aware of the demand occupations in the region and have training opportunities, no matter what academic level they are at, to prepare them to compete for these job opportunities.

Community Impact:

Employers indicate that a skilled workforce is the number one factor that predicates business success and competitive advantage. If employers thrive, communities thrive and the economy of the region thrives.

Identification of those involved/collaborators and Leveraged Resources:

Initiative	Key Partners with SC WorkForce Council	Leveraged Resources
Career Exploration Workshops	MN DEED and referrals by area service providers	
Partners in Career Exploration	9 school districts, MSU-Mankato, Carl Perkins, WF Center Partners	Leveraged resources from 9 school districts, MSU-Mankato
Demand Occupation Information	MN DEED, MN Valley Action Council	
Tour of Manufacturing	Local manufacturers, MN DEED, Greater Mankato Growth, Enterprise Minnesota	Leveraged resources from local manufacturers, GMG & Enterprise MN
National Career & Work Readiness Programs	MN DEED, Mankato Area Adult Basic Education	
FastTRAC Programming	Mankato Area ABE, LeSueur Area ABE, Faribault County ABE, Waseca County ABE, SW ABE, South Central College, MN DEED, MRCI, MN Valley Action Council	
DOL CBJT: Mechatronics	South Central College, local manufacturers, MN DEED, MN Valley Action Council	Leveraged resources from DOL, MNSCU, MNCEME, local manufacturers, & SC College
DOL CBJT: Health Care	South Central College, local health care providers, MN DEED, MN Valley Action Council, Mankato Area and Faribault Area Adult Basic Education, WDI	Leveraged resources from DOL, SC College & State Capital Bonding

Lessons Learned:

We have learned that by aligning strategies, resources and expertise of local partners we can develop more comprehensive strategies that address the workforce development needs of our key industries in the region.