

### **Overview describing the innovative best practice**

Workforce Development, Inc. would like to submit the Strategic Process of Implementing a Regional Credential as a MWCA Best Practice this year. The Southeast Minnesota Workforce Investment Board (SE MN WIB) endorsed Job Seeker Credentialing as a valuable assessment of workers' skills. After researching several credentials (both business-specific and national), the ACT National Career Readiness Credential (CRC) was selected for strategic implementation throughout Southeast Minnesota. The internal Credential Committee, made up of a variety of WDI staff people, determined and implemented the one-year roll-out schedule.

The CRC was first piloted with our Summer Youth program, then expanded to include all Pre-Employment Academy students before finally becoming available to Universal and other WorkForce Center (WFC) customers. During the expanded roll-out, WDI partnered with local Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs to offer remediation/skill building assistance to any job seeker not achieving the minimum credential.

The final component of this project was strategic outreach to local employers. Formal Employer Information Meetings (Business at Breakfast sessions) were held in five communities across Southeast Minnesota. Presenters at these meetings shared a strategic look at the regional economy, and provided details describing the credentials and what they mean to employers. This Best Practice of strategically implementing this assessment program has led to over 1300 credentialed job seekers.

Our strategic implementation of the CRC throughout the region has allowed us to present a common message to customers (both employers and jobseekers), as well as develop and share internal communication between offices on procedures to facilitate the assessment process.

### **Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)**

As noted above, over 1300 Career Readiness Certificates have been issued to jobseekers throughout southeast Minnesota (1,369 as of July 7, 2010). The credential process has become an important tool for job seekers in proving their skills to potential employers. This credential provides an objective method to document their skills, which is especially important for job seekers who lack formal education.

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

The sheer volume of certificates in the region has created conversation between employers and job seekers. In addition, the WFCs have had increased contact with employers who want more information about the certificates and what they mean. Employers are finding credential information noted on their applications, and are asking for clarification. In addition, area high school staff are interested in learning more about the credential and how it may benefit high school students.

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

Implementing the Credentialing Process throughout the region has involved the SE MN WIB members, all WDI staff, job seekers coming to the WFCs and smaller WDI offices, local and regional employers, Adult Basic Education consortiums (managers and teachers), high school principals, and guidance counselors.

### **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources**

WDI received two grants from the FastTRAC program to assist with the Strategic Process of Implementing a Regional Credential. One grant was to purchase Key Train curriculum (a remediation curriculum to assist students who did not achieve a minimum level on their assessment testing), and to support students in the Key Train curriculum with a “tuition” payment to ABE for Key Train student support.

The second FastTRAC grant enabled the creation and implementation of ABE classes that targeted Math and Computer skills, to prepare students to transfer into training and education at Community Colleges that targets the High Demand jobs within the region. All students needed a minimum Bronze credential to participate in this program.

All Pre-Employment Academy classes currently offered throughout the region by WDI require a Bronze-level credential for acceptance into the programs. The academy classes are currently supported by state and federal grants. The Summer Youth program participants complete the CRC as part of their enrollment process. The CRC is also offered to Universal Customers who come into the WFCs and WDI offices. Funds to support this service are leveraged from WDI operating funds.

### **Ideas for replication/lessons learned**

One of the questions that need to be strategically answered to facilitate a smoother implementation is “Which should happen first : targeting job seekers to get the credential out, or targeting employers to build acceptance of the credential”? In targeting the job seekers first, we were able to identify internal issues and bottlenecks in implementing the credential that did not impact employers and our relationships with their staff. When we got to the point of informing employers, we had data to present showing not only what the data meant but also how many credentials had been awarded in each area of the region. We began our employer roll-out with members of the SE MN WIB. As a result, those business representatives had a thorough understanding of the credential, and were able to contribute to the discussions at the Employer Information meetings with information on how they were using the credential in their own hiring decisions.

Replication is straightforward. WDI’s internal Credential Committee has documented the process for organizing the Employer Information meetings, as well as the process for facilitating testing to insure standardized procedures as required by ACT (the credential publisher). ACT is helpful in assisting with implementation, both with internal staff and with the Employer Information meetings.