

Overview describing the innovative best practice

One important job given to WIBs is to define the best distribution of resources within their WSA. In fall 2004, a proposal was made by Ramsey County WorkForce Center (WFC) staff to the Ramsey County WIB to consolidate the St. Paul Midway and St. Paul Downtown WFCs. While this was in light of reduced funding and staffing levels, it would also allow better customer service, the opportunity to add more partners, share costs, provide free parking for customers and make the site truly a “one-stop”. The Downtown Center was great for those clients who utilized public transport, but parking fees discouraged those with cars to use the center. At the Midway center, parking was plentiful, but it was far on the edge of the City and getting full with no space to grow. These accessibility factors, along with the fact that neither location had all WIA programs at their site, led to the conclusion that a new consolidated center in the City of St. Paul was the best plan of action for our customers.

The RCWIB delegated the research for this project to its Communication, Advocacy and Oversight committee (CAO) where they examined all aspects of the project. Through their discussions and research, the group defined what they felt was important to be mindful of when looking for a new location. This included factors like proximity to a bus line, parking availability, visibility, etc.

In April 2005, the WIB and Workforce Solutions made a presentation to the Ramsey County Board about consolidating the two St. Paul WFCs into one comprehensive center. The County and WIB would jointly own the decision allowing the stakeholders to have input through the WIB with the Core Partners (Workforce Solutions, Rehabilitation Services, and Job Service) providing needed data to make decisions. An ad hoc was formed to move forward with this process and complete the work.

The ad hoc (including representatives from the Core Partners, the WIB, the city of St. Paul, the State of Minnesota and Ramsey County) developed the RFP that the state of MN released to the public. The criteria for evaluating the RFP was defined as follows: Location (part of a commercial retail corridor, visible accessible space, within 2 blocks of a high frequency bus route, available parking), Cost and Physical Criteria (24,000 sq. ft. contiguous space, signage, guest bathrooms easily accessible from center, expansion space.) Advertisement on the RFP was accomplished through a FAX blast as well as notification in the Pioneer Press and the Star Tribune and notice on the State and the RCWIB websites.

To evaluate the proposals received, a ten-member team was formed made up of three WIB business members, two Ramsey County WIA partners (Workforce Solutions and DEED), two WIB community-based organizations, one county representative, one city representative, one workforce program participant and one State of MN Real Estate Management Representative. The team met in January 2006 to review the proposals and submit a recommendation to the WIB and County.

The Evaluation Team agreed the submitted proposals didn't meet the criteria and asked the State do another search. In March 2006, the request was advertised again. In April, the Evaluation team visited the newly proposed sites. A recommendation was made to the WIB in early May of the site known as the 540 Fairview building as it met the details of the vision of the new Ramsey County WFC. During May and June, the partners worked with the architects to develop a space plan for the site while the proposed site was recommended for approval by the WIB's Communication, Advocacy and Oversight Committee, Executive Committee and full WIB Board which approved the site on June 1st. The Ramsey County Board approved the recommendation of the new site on June 27, 2006.

Jobseeker impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

The new WFC is a bricks and mortar facility that is located to meet the demands of business and current and potential workers offering a variety of services intended to enhance the match between

businesses and job-ready workers. The WFC will be host to businesses, employers looking for workers, potential and future workers including dislocated workers, low-wage earners, cash assisted families, disabled individuals and youth. Additional partners will be included at the new site, which will allow for customers to utilize a variety of services in one location. For example, St. Paul College will be located at the new WFC providing training and education that readies individuals for the current job market. The space will be part of a larger community that is easy to use, customer-friendly, and focused on customer service.

Community impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

The community impact that the new WFC location will have is one that the WIB anticipates to be very positive. Located in a high profile and high need area, the center's easy access will allow those who have the least access to transportation to be able to utilize the resources available. Also, with the variety of partners located at the center, those who come for services will find the center to be one that is welcoming and easy to navigate. The hope is that the businesses will see the center as a "go to" place for their questions which will, in turn, create a stronger relationship between workforce development programs and the private sector. This relationship will ultimately provide the community with job opportunities. The natural outcome would be a more prosperous community.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

When addressing a project as highly needed and far-reaching as a WFC, it is prudent to include many diverse viewpoints that help to bring the project to the proper conclusion. All levels of the process (identifying the need of a new WFC, developing the RFP, evaluating the options that were presented) included representation of the various stakeholders in our community. During the initial exploration of the concept, WFC staff presented information to the WIB who in turn collaborated with the elected officials as well as the larger WIB Board for a decision to move forward with the project.

The next step of the process was to develop an RFP for the new site. WFC staff provided valuable insight which was then given to an ad hoc that was formed from the WIB. This ad hoc included core partners (Workforce Solutions, Rehab Services, and Job Services), business members, economic development, the City of St. Paul, Ramsey County and the State of MN.

Once the responses came in from the RFP, an evaluation team was formed that included business representatives, WIA partners, community based organizations, education representatives, elected officials, a WFC participant and a representative from the State of MN.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

The process of locating a new WFC included many resources. Some by necessity with others providing valuable input based on experience. Below are organizations that aided in the Ramsey County WFC relocation project: MN Department of Employment and Economic Development; MN Real Estate Management Division; Dakota County WIB; Workforce Solutions; Ramsey County; City of St. Paul; Saint Paul Port Authority; Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and the Ramsey County WIB. Notably from the Ramsey County WIB were members from the private sector with expertise in commercial real estate.

Ability for use or replication by others

The process used for locating the new Ramsey County WFC is very applicable for other areas. In determining this type of decision, other WSAs may take the steps of the decision process and utilize them with their board and their community. This project truly involved a large segment of our community, which is apropos for a resource that should be utilized by all segments of the population.