



MWCA 2006 Best Practices Recognition

OVERVIEW

One of MWCA's Goals for 2006 was to encourage and share best practices among members.

In addition to setting aside time to share ideas and discuss innovative initiatives at the Annual Meeting in Duluth, MWCA will honor up to three Workforce Investment Boards whose innovative efforts and collaboration had a positive impact in their Workforce Service Area. These awards will recognize efforts to think innovatively, leverage resources, and benefit both jobseekers and the greater community.

NOMINATION GUIDELINES

MWCA encourages each WIB to submit at least one nomination.

Please complete the attached nomination form, and no more than two pages describing the initiative. Include a discussion of how the Board's efforts support MWCA's goals of ensuring that both employers and workers have the resources and skills Minnesota needs to remain competitive.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Judges will be selected and announced shortly. Judges will evaluate each nomination and award points based solely on the information you provide in the nomination information. The categories and possible points are:

Criteria for Selection of Outstanding Best Practices	Maximum Points
Overview describing the innovative best practice	25
Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)	25
Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)	20
Identification of those involved, including collaborators	15
Leveraging/alignment of outside resources	10
Ability for use or replication by others	05

DEADLINE: *Please submit nominations by close of business Thursday, July 27, 2006.*

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Trish Taylor phone: (612) 770-8934 e-mail: ttaylor818@yahoo.com

Anne Olson phone: (651) 224-3344 e-mail: aolson@mncounites.org



MWCA 2006 BEST PRACTICES RECOGNITION NOMINATION FORM

WIB Name/WSA Stearns-Benton Workforce Council, WSA # 17

Submitted by Kathy Zavala, SBETC Executive Director

Attach a description (no more than two pages) describing the initiative.

Please return via e-mail or fax to Anne Olson by **Thursday, July 27.**
aolson@mncounties.org or (651) 224-6540

 (Leave this section blank -to be completed by judges)

Judge # _____

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Overview describing the innovative best practice	25	
Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)	25	
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Leveraging/alignment of outside resources	10	
Ability for use or replication by others	05	
TOTAL:	100	

The Mission of the Stearns-Benton Workforce Council is, “We exist to provide comprehensive workforce development, helping community members acquire the skill, training, and experience to achieve economic security while meeting the human resource needs of local business and industry.” Their goals include: “Ensure Minnesota workers have the opportunities to improve earning potential by acquiring, advancing and transferring their skills.

In 2002, the Stearns-Benton Workforce Council and a broad-based community partnership completed a Community Assessment, which identified strategic industries for growth. This led to a shift in resource utilization to support these industries in economic and workforce development. The Council now commits 85% of training funds to support skill development in the strategic industries.

“Workforce U” developed as a result of employers repeatedly telling us that job applicants lack the ability to:

- Pass a reading and/or math test;
- Pass a drug test;
- Come to work every day and on time;
- Problem solve;
- Understand how their job performance impacts others, including the employer’s bottom line.

The purpose of “Workforce U” is to build community capacity in economic development, and to meet the workforce needs of business and jobseekers, building prosperity by *acquiring, advancing and transferring skills in strategic industries*. The Council, working with strategic industry employers, identified a service delivery mechanism and skill certification program for these industries, which is Workforce “U”.

Workforce “U” classes are offered in all regionally key industries--healthcare, printing and publishing, manufacturing, wholesale trade, and business services. Workforce “U” was developed in partnership with area employers including: Gold’n Plump; Engel Metallurgical; Melrose Area Hospital; Woodcraft Industries, Inc.; Express Personnel Services; Nahan Printing, Inc.; Komo Machine, Inc.; Catholic Charities – St. Cloud; VA Medical Center; St. Cloud Hospital; Pro Staff; and many others. These and other partners contribute in-kind by helping to teach course, providing classroom sites, tours of industry and other resources to the classes. SBETC has shared the curriculum with Central Minnesota Jobs & Training, Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council and Workforce Solutions.

Workforce U” begins with general workforce development services including career information for the universal job seeker and progresses to specific courses for participants in eligibility-based WorkForce Center programs that provide thorough assessment and career exploration of these industries and occupations. While the job seeker has the option of exploring all industries and occupations, the job seeker is informed’ from the beginning, that Workforce “U” will challenge them to consider a future in one of the strategic industries our community is wishing to grow. Workforce “U” students currently include dislocated workers, older youth, public assistance recipients, and selected other eligible adults. It is our goal to use this model to integrate services and customers of WorkForce Centers and Community partners.

Those who attend “Workforce U” receive the opportunity to investigate the career pathway of a strategic industry to determine if it is suitable and if the student (jobseeker) can meet employer needs and expectations by participating in six to eight weeks of skills assessment, career exploration, and short-term training, thereby demonstrating job readiness. Introductory Workforce “U” classes provide a very thorough assessment of interests, skills, aptitudes, assets/strengths, work history, education, training, personality type, values and Work Keys assessments in reading, math and locating information. With this comprehensive assessment information and under the guidance of a skilled Career Planner, the job seeker completes a Personal Profile identifying which of the strategic industry areas, high-growth/high wage industries, demand driven occupations and/or career laddering occupations s/he wishes to pursue. The job seeker then moves into a more in-depth career exploration of the six strategic industries which provides an opportunity to see, interact with employers, and try

hands-on projects within the selected industry. The goal is that job seeker will have good understanding of the industry and that career goal is a good match for both job seeker and future employer.

Additional Workforce “U” classes provide for both short and long-term training in these industries as dictated by the Individual Service Strategy plan for each job seeker. Courses are offered at 100, 200, 300 and 400 levels. Classes at the 300 and 400 levels are offered in partnership with St. Cloud Technical College, St. Cloud State University, and other colleges/universities. Each course has employer-identified prerequisites, purposes, outcomes, competency standards and measurements. Healthcare Academies, Certified Nursing Assistant training for English Language Learners and other activities are built to expand student (job seeker) options in the context of Workforce “U”.

At each level of Workforce “U”, soft skills determined of most value to prospective employers are required to be demonstrated and documented. Credentials are documented at each level as well, providing job seeker and prospective employer verification of skills attained. Because program limitations often allow the job seeker to only begin in the career path, career laddering is a vital part of the individual planning process with each program participant.

“Workforce U” provides a framework and a language that is understood by employers and job seekers (students). It integrates the assessment, career exploration, labor market information, career counseling, training and placement activities that are common to our WorkForce Centers and so difficult to explain. Benchmarks and standards (credentials) are identified that result in a value-added referral of a student (jobseeker) to an employer. Program/model evaluation and change are on-going.