

BRISTOL COUNTY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

SOUTHEAST HEALTH CARE COLLABORATIVE



Partnership Members:

Saint Anne's Hospital, Southcoast Hospitals Group, Stanley Street Treatment and Resources, Visiting Nurses Association of Southeastern Massachusetts, Taber Street Nursing and Rehabilitation, Healthfirst Family Care Center, Essex Group Management, United Interfaith Action, organized labor, Bristol Workforce Investment Board, Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board.

BayStateWorks Promising Practice Case Study

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– Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Massachusetts

1 The Need

The Southeast Health Care Collaborative (SEHCC) is an employer-driven partnership aimed at increasing the productivity of businesses and the skills of the workforce by allowing entry-level and lower skilled employees the ability to advance to higher-level positions within the health care industry. The main program activity will be a multi-faceted training effort targeting skill sets that have been prioritized by the partnership’s employers. Training areas include Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), customer service, basic computer skills, medical coding and medical terminology.

In order to ensure that the goals of the partnership are achieved, it is imperative that recruitment and marketing strategies are designed and implemented to ensure high enrollment numbers into the SEHCC training programs. It is also crucial to maximize the training dollars by ensuring full enrollment in all classes. The Collaborative members were aware that without buy-in from all levels of stakeholders that courses would not be promoted to their full potential and enrollment would suffer. The challenge for the SEHCC was to develop a comprehensive recruitment strategy that would ensure full enrollment and a broad sense of ownership of this training initiative among the employees and employers alike.

2 The Solution

The proposed solution to ensure successful recruitment efforts is a customized, multi-prong, multi-level approach to recruit participants. This includes both developing and disseminating marketing materials and building relationships with employers, employees, supervisors and community organizations. This multi-prong approach creates a sense of ownership amongst the constituents for the grant and the training programs involved. A major aspect of this approach will be the marketing of the training and training benefits to supervisors and other leaders to create buy-in and ownership. These strong relationships, combined with many successful enrollment processes, have jumpstarted the training efforts. SEHCC partners continue to develop new and exciting ways to approach recruitment.

Goals: The following goals will help determine the success of the recruitment strategy that SEHCC has designed.

1. Meet/Exceed the negotiated contract amount of serving 550 unduplicated participants
2. Achieve 80% of full enrollment in all classes
3. Achieve 80% retention (completion) rate in individual training courses

3 Implementation

The first marketing efforts were opportunities not just to present training opportunities to employers, but also to introduce the overall goals of increased business productivity and a more skilled workforce. Employers were shown how these goals could be achieved by enabling entry-level and lower skilled employees to advance to higher-level positions within the health care industry. It was necessary that leaders of each SEHCC partnering employer understood and supported this goal so that each leader could provide a clear strategic vision for their employee supervisors. This buy-in by the leaders ensured that individual departments and the organization as a whole would maximize utilization of training and receive its desired benefits.

The marketing of the purpose and goal of this initiative began well before the BayStateWorks grant was awarded. Each partner organization held internal conversations to gather information, conduct a needs assessment, and to determine training priorities for the development of the grant proposal. Once the BayStateWorks grant was awarded to SEHCC, the Project Coordinator began to communicate with the leadership at each partner organization through leadership team meetings, meetings with human resources departments, and staff meetings. The Project Coordinator provided leaders with materials explaining SEHCC for them to distribute and present at other internal meetings. She created a one-page overview of SEHCC and BayStateWorks to provide information regarding goals, training, timeframes and funding for the partners and community members (see Appendix A). The goal of these activities was to give supervisors an understanding of the purpose of the grant in order to ensure promotion of training courses and encouragement of attendance to employees. Shortly into the delivery of training, it became clear that supervisors had an impact not only on participant enrollment, but also on the class attendance rates. This further emphasized the importance of gaining supervisor support for the initiative.

Building relationships with supervisors and members of the health care leadership team continued throughout the grant. The SEHCC partners maximized opportunities to include supervisors in curriculum development, evaluation, and events demonstrating the success of the grant. Many supervisors participated in the development of the training request for proposals (RFP), and the review and evaluation of proposals received. SEHCC partners anticipated that if a supervisor were to be involved in the process of developing and reviewing a curriculum, that this would increase his/her awareness of SEHCC and create approval for the training area. In turn, partners hoped that this buy-in would translate to supervisors encouraging employees to attend. Educating supervisors and employer partners was also key to the implementation of training. Adult Basic Education was a concept with which not all employers and supervisors were familiar at the beginning of this initiative. They were unsure as to the structure of the training, the timeframe in which a degree would be received, and the benefit to the organization. To respond to these concerns, an Adult Basic Education Information session was held to answer questions and identify how curricula can be developed to ensure a benefit to the organization and department.

Supervisors also participated in events that recognized the success of individual training courses and the overall initiative. They were invited to attend English for Speakers of Other Languages, Pre-GED (General Educational Development) and Certified Nurses Aide (CNA) graduation and completion ceremonies. This actually created a dual effect: both encouraging participants to

continue with training and also providing motivational incentive for supervisors to continue to offer flexibility in scheduling and encouragement to their employees. Supervisor involvement was critical for the success of the longer-term courses because these courses were more affected by barriers such as work schedules, family priorities, burnout, and other daily life concerns. There were cases in which employees that were interested in participation in these courses were unable to do so, primarily due to supervisors' unwillingness to help coordinate work schedules around classes or classes around work schedules. Though SEHCC is happy to report that this was the rare situation, it further emphasizes the impact a supervisor may have on the success of a participant in a longer-term course, both negative and positive.

In addition to the participation of supervisors in the development and review of curricula and proposals, each employer partner, along with his/her supervisors, was encouraged to customize certain training to better meet their organization's needs. One example of this is the customer service training curriculum. Originally, SEHCC partners had requested a 40-hour customer service training for staff. At the time the RFP for customer service training was developed, it was clear that supervisors were having a difficult time releasing employees for lengthier training times. With this in mind, upon the award of the customer service contract, three different curricula were negotiated: a twenty-hour "Basic Customer Service," a twenty-hour "AchieveGlobal" Customer Service and a 40-hour "Comprehensive Customer Service." Additionally, employer partners were given the flexibility to choose individual modules to present to staff, allowing a range in training durations from four hours to 40 hours. Employer partners were encouraged to speak with class facilitators to ensure that the vision and culture of their organization was embodied in training. Supervisors were more amenable to releasing employees to attend flexible training, especially when on-site customized modules of the desired length and time were provided.

One employer partner implemented an aggressive customer service training initiative aimed at entry- and mid-level staff. The employer aimed to gain the support and involvement of supervisors in order for this initiative to be integrated into the organization, and to enable supervisors to give positive encouragement to employees. Four months prior to the release of the courses designed for frontline workers, supervisors were required to attend the full 20-hour customer service module offered over a three-month period. As the facilitator would lead the group through the course, she would stop to reflect periodically to ensure the material was appropriate for frontline staff and to note feedback and examples that could be utilized in the future training. The supervisors were both participating in customer service training and providing input to further develop the curriculum for delivery to their employees. There were several anticipated outcomes of utilizing this strategy: increased cooperation amongst supervisors to enroll employees into the training; better understanding of each module so as to allow strategic enrollment, matching employee skill needs with modules addressing those needs; familiarity with the training approaches to allow a uniformed approach in each department and the organization as a whole; and encouragement and reassurance to the staff from supervisors that these trainings were both fun and beneficial.

As described, there were many targeted approaches to increase awareness and create ownership and buy-in of this training initiative amongst supervisors. It was of course also necessary to ensure that the incumbent employees were aware of these training opportunities. Though some

training was mandatory and employees attended because it was their work assignment for the day, there were other training areas (Computer Skills, Leadership, Adult Basic Education, Medical Terminology, Medical Billing & Coding) that employees had to request to attend. With the focus on promoting the benefits of training to supervisors, it was anticipated that supervisors would allow, if not encourage, participation. To promote trainings to staff, SEHCC program staff created marketing materials, utilized internal contacts and took advantage of every opportunity available to share with staff the possible training categories in which they could participate.

During the first weeks of grant implementation, a logo was designed to brand the SEHCC name and provide familiarity with the training initiative. Three logo designs were developed and presented to the partnership to best ensure that a logo representative of the partnership was selected. Similarly, the partnership originally brainstormed and chose the partnership name and acronym. The frequent use of the SEHCC acronym on flyers, materials, course titles, and employer communications assisted in the branding of the initiative. In addition to the logo, a standardized flyer theme was developed, including the logo, to increase awareness of the initiative and all associated trainings (see Appendix D). A new flyer was updated to include specific training information for each training area and distributed to all partners. Partners were asked to ensure that proper contact information was on the flyer prior to distribution throughout their organization. Identifying one contact person (recruitment contact) at each organization streamlined the registration process, but also created an internal cheerleader to promote the training. Recruitment contacts have noted that they have spent significant amounts of time speaking at meetings, knocking on doors and reminding participants about the classes. The employers that have taken advantage of the training offered through the grant have a Recruitment Contact who dedicates part of his/her time to SEHCC training. In addition, employers utilized newsletters to promote training and to recognize participants who had completed training through this initiative (see Appendix C).

A final attempt was made to promote training at the beginning of each course. The Project Coordinator attended the first class of each course to ensure a timely start and to inform participants about the Southeast Health Care Collaborative, the BayStateWorks grant and other training offered through the initiative. This was an opportunity to provide a clear picture of the overall goals of the grant and to increase enrollment in other courses. Both the internal contact and the frequent presence of the Project Coordinator on the employer sites generally, as well as at courses, assessments, and graduations in particular, personified the initiative, providing names and faces for supervisors and employees to identify with the initiative.

In addition to the emphasis placed on an internal marketing strategy, SEHCC also focused on external marketing as a tool to educate the private sector about sector initiatives and the importance of employee training. External marketing included articles in the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) newsletter, reports at WIB quarterly meetings, and press conferences celebrating the success of the grant and the collaborative (see Appendix E). A spring celebration is scheduled for June 2006 to highlight the successes of the grant, the collaborative and the highly active employers and employees who participated. Through a partnership with United Interfaith Action, a faith-based coalition of churches in both Fall River and New Bedford, information about SEHCC trainings was disseminated via church bulletins in an attempt to reach any members that were employed by SEHCC-participating employers. This medium was

especially important in identifying individuals interested in participating in ESOL and GED courses. External marketing was utilized as a component of an ongoing WIB strategy to expand sector initiatives and educate the community about the potential of sector initiatives.

4 Results

In order to determine the success of the recruitment strategy, the following goals were measured as of May 1, 2006:

Goal	Outcome
Meet/Exceed the negotiated contract amount of serving 550 unduplicated participants	As of 7/13/06, a total of 700 individuals had been served through BayStateWorks. This number is anticipated to increase significantly as additional trainings are held in the remaining months of the grant.
Achieve 80% of full enrollment in all classes	As of 5/1/06, 43% of all classes were enrolled to 80% or higher capacity, based on original estimates of class capacity.
Achieve 80% retention (completion) rate in individual training courses	As of 5/1/06, 88% of all participants enrolled in a training course successfully met the completion criteria for the individual course.

The Southeast Health Care Collaborative will exceed its goals of serving 550 individuals and attain 80% completion of training courses by individual participants. The completion rate is a very important result because it demonstrates the dedication that participants, and even more so, supervisors, have to the training program. Attendance issues were commonly linked to work load or other job-related stresses, which prevented the participant from leaving the work site and attending training. Common reasons given for attendance lapses by participants and their supervisors include:

- “There is too much work to do.”
- “I am in the middle of a major project and can’t get away to train.”
- “Another employee called in sick and we can’t allow anyone to attend training.”

Given these common and understandable work-related barriers, it is significant that 88% of all participants who enrolled in a course completed the course. This demonstrates that supervisors and participants valued the training enough to put projects, workload and other barriers aside to ensure that the employee received necessary training.

The overall results of the marketing strategy utilized in this initiative varied by employer site based on numerous factors, including individual employer marketing strategy and commitment to the initiative. Of the seven participating SEHCC employers, some utilized training to a greater extent than others did. The results achieved in individual organizations are reflective of the success of the marketing strategy, but more specifically, the success in any one site reflects the initial marketing strategy that occurred “top-down” in each organization during the development

and implementation of the grant. Partners with the most successful recruitment of participants shared a few characteristics in their approach to the grant, mostly as a result of similar initial marketing strategies aimed at promoting the collaborative and the grant to the management and supervisors. These common traits include:

- dedicated staff to coordinate, promote and encourage training participation;
- committed members of high-level leadership who strongly encouraged/mandated training (both to employees and supervisors);
- involved members of high-level leadership and supervisors who recognized, encouraged and supported participants, including attending awards ceremonies, showing a willingness to allow for and coordinate flexible scheduling, and offering general praise and encouragement to participants on a daily basis;
- ownership of training courses, including course customization to meet organizational needs, utilization of courses as an integral part of organization-wide training initiatives and providing opportunities for supervisors to address individual departmental needs through customized training.

Of course, the most influential marketing strategy was the training itself. Employers and supervisors were encouraged to send additional employees to training when employees shared and demonstrated new skills obtained during training. Furthermore, employees were apt to request training due to the success and enjoyment that their co-workers found as a result of training. Computer training provided an opportunity for individuals to obtain new skills that could be directly used in the workplace. Many partners noted that employees who had once been apprehensive of computers were now creating spreadsheets for every occasion, increasing productivity in the workplace, but also increasing their awareness of effective processes and their individual capabilities.

Employers were also impressed with the effects of the customer service training, creating an increased awareness of the need for customer service training and an awareness of the immediate impact that even short-term training can have on an employee and organization. Employer partners made the following comments regarding participation of their employees in customer service training:

“Employees that have participated in customer service training have noticeably improved in their delivery of customer service, increasing organizational standards and exceeding qualitative measures.”

- *Visiting Nurse Association of Southeastern Massachusetts*

“Participants in customer service training modules have increased their understanding of who the customer is, expanding this role to internal customers, their co-workers. Employees have emphasized how important it is to provide good customer service to other departments within their organization in order to achieve the highest level of care for the patient.”

- *Saint Anne's Hospital*

The initial impact of customer service training sparked an increased demand for this training, which resulted in comprehensive customer service training initiatives at several SEHCC employer partner sites. The dedication to this training occurred as a result of an unplanned marketing approach that promoted organizational needs and the impressive results of customer service training.

5 Lessons

Through the BayStateWorks grant, there were many lessons for the Southeast Health Care Collaborative to learn in various areas. The following aspects were noted as key for success in future similar projects:

1. Dedication and commitment of partner leadership (senior management) to the training program prior to its beginning.

It is crucial that the leadership of each participating employer commit to the training and release time involved. A member of leadership who has strong commitment to training provides direction and guidance to supervisors regarding the importance of training within the organization. Furthermore, senior managers who produce evidence of the organization's commitment via memos, newsletters, discussion at leadership meetings, and participation in training courses and events increase the likelihood that supervisors will not just cooperate, but will encourage and/or direct participants to attend training.

2. Development of training courses and curricula that are aimed at the target audience.

A key measure to ensure enrollment and completion of training courses is the development of curricula that meet the current and future needs of employees and the organization. Involvement of supervisors should begin during grant development to ensure that the design of training courses is responsive to the pressing needs of their departments. Employers should conduct a needs analysis of employee skills, deficits and future expectations of employees, both internally and through accrediting bodies. Employers should take advantage of this opportunity to prepare their workforce for the future. This includes examining issues of quality, changing laws, job descriptions and identification of needs. Supervisors should additionally be involved in developing training schedules and the length of courses. Simply stated, if the training will increase the productivity of a department or prepare employees to meet future needs, supervisors will be more inclined to adjust schedules and support participants.

3. Recognition of the benefit of training to the organization, not just the employee.

Partners should recognize the benefit of training to the overall organization, not just the employee. Training needs to be integrated into the overall goals and strategy of the organization through well-developed and meaningful curricula, as previously discussed. Employers should anticipate and work to ensure that training will increase productivity, decrease turnover and provide a pipeline of dedicated and well-trained staff to fill vacancies, especially in positions with high levels of shortages. If these goals are well established, high enrollment and completion rates will follow naturally.

6 Conclusion

Awareness and knowledge of the goals of a training initiative are imperative to its success. Though marketing is typically directed toward employees, it is crucial that training initiative planners market the program to supervisors and high-level leadership as well. Employers must understand the short-and long-term benefits of training, and be prepared to articulate to their staff the anticipated goal and desired outcomes as a result of training. It is only when employers buy-in to the program, including its methods, goals, and outcomes, that employer partners are able to reap the benefits of the training program.

7 Appendices

- Appendix A: Southeast Health Care Collaborative Overview. This one-page overview was written to help supervisors and other members of leadership at the partner employers increase their understanding of the grant. This was distributed in the early phase of the grant prior to the introduction of training.
- Appendix B: Supervisor Communication. This sample document was used by employers to communicate with supervisors regarding upcoming training.
- Appendix C: Employer Newsletters. Various employers used monthly/quarterly newsletters to promote training or honor staff who had participated in or completed training.
- Appendix D: Marketing Flyers. Flyers, including logo and internal contact information, were used to distribute course information to supervisors and employees.
- Appendix E: Bristol WIB Update. The Bristol WIB utilized quarterly newsletters to document the opportunities provided by and the success of the SEHCC and BayStateWorks as part of an external marketing strategy.