

NORTH SHORE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

BUILDING EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CAREER CENTERS IN SECTOR INITIATIVES



BayStateWorks Promising Practice Case Study

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“Participation in JAM reinforces the proactive model of understanding the business customer first and then customizing service delivery and training around those needs.”

- Mark Whitmore
Director
North Shore Career Center

1 The Need

Sector initiatives are most successful when all partners are full participants. However, while career centers can and should play an important role in sector initiatives, they are not always fully integrated into project leadership boards and activities. This lack of integration may be due to structural divisions between those operating pilot initiatives and the on-going workforce development system. Or, it may be due to lack of financial resources. In either case, the lack of integration can result in lost relationship-building and networking opportunities among the career center and other project partners as well as missed learning opportunities around the workforce needs of the industry. Moreover, career center involvement in sector initiatives can lead to project sustainability as the career center is better able to work with project partners following the project. Without integration during the pilot phase, such sustainability potential is often lost once project funds are gone.

Building on the experience of the BEST Older Youth TURBO project where the Career Center took an active role in case management and job placement activities, program leaders intend to expand Career Center participation into all aspects of the Jobs in Aerospace Manufacturing (JAM) project.

2 The Solution

This Promising Practice case study will examine the program's efforts to fully integrate the North Shore Career Center into JAM via the Business Services Unit (BSU). The BSU is a new initiative of the North Shore Career Center, where staff are strategically assigned to meet the needs of local companies, rather than focusing directly on the needs of local job seekers. The premise behind the BSU is that improved services to businesses will result in better services to job seekers and a stronger workforce development system on the North Shore.

Program leaders intend to address this issue in the followings ways:

- A BSU representative will regularly attend and actively participate in JAM project meetings. This will facilitate networking, relationship-building, and learning in relation to understanding and meeting the employment needs of the manufacturing industry on the North Shore.

- The BSU will assist business partners in filling vacancies, both those related to JAM and others that will become available through the grant period.
- The JAM Case Manager will be located at the Career Center.
- Career Center staff will participate in JAM program events and provide JAM students with assessment, career preparation, and job development services.
- The BSU will continue to provide business partners, as well as additional manufacturing companies, with employment services after the life of the project.

3 Implementation

The North Shore Career Center is an active partner in JAM via the BSU. A BSU representative regularly participates in JAM project meetings; by doing so, the BSU has had the opportunity to learn first-hand about the workforce needs of manufacturing employers. The BSU has also been able to build relationships with training providers as well as learn about training programs available for individuals interested in the manufacturing industry. This facilitates the BSU's assisting of companies to fill open positions and obtain training that will improve efficiency and company success. In addition, the BSU participates in JAM staff training, also helping to increase its understanding of the manufacturing industry.

The Career Center takes an active role in all program activities. For instance, the BSU collaborated with the North Shore Workforce Investment Board in planning and holding a job fair for pre-employed students. The Career Center also continually provides JAM's pre-employed students with career preparation and job development assistance. For example, the Career Center workshop facilitator designed and delivered a resume writing workshop specifically for JAM students. Career Center staff assisted JAM students with resume critiques as needed. The Career Center also provided Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) testing for JAM applicants, helping to make the application process more timely and efficient.

Tony Guerrero, the JAM Case Manager, is located at the Career Center and fully integrated into the Career Center staff. He is able to meet with students on a regular basis and share information with other Career Center staff. He is also in a position to share resources and learn from other staff members. Tony finds the experience of working out of the Career Center very helpful. As he states, "I find working as a team member with other Career Center staff very effective. We have been able to collaborate with one another as well as with training providers and employers to continuously improve our services on behalf of both employer and trainee."

4 Results

The results of this initiative are overwhelmingly positive as program staff have built an effective working relationship with the Career Center. Lisa Brown, the BSU representative, is clearly an important and active member of the project team and has learned much from her participation in it. As she states, "JAM is a great opportunity to learn about the manufacturing industry, network, and truly be part of a team. By working as a team we are better able to serve our students and employers. I intend to continuously apply what I have learned about the industry as I work with manufacturing employers. I am also looking forward to continuing to work with our partners and build on what we have learned in the future."

Program leaders accomplished their goals. In addition to providing a representative to regularly attend JAM meetings and building relationships with employers, the BSU assists business partners in filling vacancies. The Career Center lists job openings on their website and refers qualified individuals to vacancies, which cannot be filled by JAM students. The Career Center also assists in placing pre-employed JAM students in entry-level manufacturing positions. Notably, all students wanting manufacturing positions have been placed. The JAM Case Manager remains stationed at the Career Center and is an effective member of the Career Center staff. Also, the Career Center staff provide JAM students with employer services.

A sustainable outcome of JAM will be an increased knowledge base for the Career Center about the needs of manufacturing companies. This is critical as manufacturing is the third largest employer on the North Shore, employing 17% of the area's labor force. JAM has provided the BSU staff with the opportunity to network and build lasting relationships with local manufacturing companies.

5 Lessons

The major take-away from this case study is the importance of team-building and fully engaging all project partners. In order to accomplish this, all partners need to be involved in conversations regarding the project as well as included in making decisions. This allows all partners to contribute to the project and leads to better services and outcomes.

It is also important not to forget that there is a significant amount of learning that takes place during the project. This learning needs to be shared amongst all partners and used to sustain the project as well as to improve future ones. The Career Center can use this knowledge to improve the services it provides to specific industries. According to Mark Whitmore, the North Shore Career Center Director, the primary reason for becoming fully involved in JAM was to take advantage of the unique learning opportunity it presented: "Even though the Career Center did not receive direct financial support from the project, we felt that it was critical for the BSU to take advantage of this excellent opportunity to increase its knowledge of the manufacturing sector, an important part of the North Shore economy. Participation in JAM reinforces the proactive model of understanding the business customer first and then customizing service delivery and training around those needs."

Finally, the Career Center is critical to the sustainability of the project. The relationships that employers build with Career Center staff can be maintained long after the project is over. These relationships allow for the Career Center to better meet the needs of businesses and individual job seekers. They have a better knowledge of the labor needs of employers as well as the skills needed by individual job seekers.

The JAM project demonstrates that it is possible to build effective working relationships between the Career Center and program staff in sector initiatives. These relationships help to address the workforce needs of specific sectors. The Career Center has an important role to play in sector initiatives and should be utilized to the fullest.