



## Lessons Learned Summary

Recommendations taken from 20 case studies, done as part of the BayStateWorks sector initiative  
July 2006



## 1. Partnering, Building Working Relationships

### Benefits of diverse partners

- a. Program leaders found that while each employer partner produced vastly different products, their demands regarding the readiness of their workforce was the same: ability to adhere to safety standards, receive training regarding use of equipment, not abuse sick days and understand that the product and viability of the company is directly related to the actions of its workforce.
- b. There is no substitute for having a supportive advisory board and partners from the fields that the program is attempting to serve. These are the individuals who are invaluable in helping to link the goals for student competencies to real world experience.

### Team-building

- a. In successful team-building, all partners need to be involved in conversations regarding the project and included in making decisions. This allows all partners to actively contribute to the project and leads to better services and outcomes.
- b. The benefits of a strong planning team, which includes representatives from management, union leaders, instructors and the Project Director, cannot be emphasized enough. This team needs to act as a collective whole and be open to, as well as regularly seek, input from employees.

### Collaborative process

- a. Developing a collaborative work group, from the start of the project, strengthened program leaders' ability to ensure that all of the partners' needs were met throughout the initiative. Program leaders were able to use regularly scheduled work group meetings for ongoing discussion, evaluation and review of the processes. Program leaders found that an integrated team strategy worked very effectively to ensure that candidates who completed training would be appropriate for hire.
- b. The keys to effective coalitions are excellent communication, clearly defined roles, mutual goals, trust and "buy-in" from all the members. This "buy-in" is greatly enhanced by involving the partners in all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation. Partners then work to find a shared vision and recognize when just one organization's action alone, will not solve the problem. A partnership can only be successful if all agree that the program reflects their desires and meets their expectations.

### Check reality.

Evaluate the collaboration, assessing both the progress toward goals and the strength of the group itself. This formative assessment is a useful way to identify possible trouble spots and can provide a guide for discussion and improvement.

### Establish trust.

This takes time to develop. Processes and decisions must be transparent.

### Do real work together.

It's important that a group make decisions, share responsibilities and produce products. There must be agreement on the work to be done, clear responsibilities of each of the partners and the staff. It is best put it in writing.

### Convey information, not noise.

Be sure to keep partners informed, but be careful not to “spam” them. Conduct meaningful meetings that members will want to attend and that will lead them to view attendance as an essential part of their jobs.

**Manage conflict.**

Make conflict acceptable and create ways of handling it.

**Establish contingency plans.**

Recognize that external events will affect partners and may even cause them to resign. Establish contingency plans for continuing the work.

**Develop governance guidelines.**

Discussions leading to the memorandum of agreement can clarify some issues up-front and allow a multi-partner team or Steering Committee to function immediately.

**Time commitment**

The team approach requires substantial and costly staff investment for all parties. This is important not only during the initial planning phase, but throughout implementation. Regularly scheduled meetings among all the partners allows for timely adjustments and problem-solving, but required a large commitment. It is particularly important to help any potential, employer partner make a realistic assessment of the amount of time they will need to contribute. Partners often meet on a regular basis, twice a month in the initial stages of the grant, and then monthly.

**Recognition and appreciation of partners.**

In addition to recognizing students, graduations become publicity opportunities for both the program and their partners. Both partners also seek other opportunities for mutual promotion.

**Partnering with employers**

a. It is important to keep on top of your grant every day. Listening to employers is critical to a successful outcome. Determine who should be at the table is probably the toughest job in formulating a successful plan. Program leaders clearly recognize the value of having employer representation at the table from the beginning. This should include hiring managers as well as human resources staff. Also developing a tight working relationship with the funding source and all key partners is critical for success.

b. Be fluid. Never expect that your plan or program is carved in stone. Businesses sometimes run hot and cold, which means their participation in training projects may change or terminate. You need to be able to be innovative and change direction when need dictates. Most importantly, understand that the employer needs to make money! That is their prime directive so you need to be sensitive and flexible regarding the training schedules.

c. Start small, do your homework. When engaging an industry like hospitality, for example, start slowly and small. Each hotel has very different hiring practices and culture. It takes time to meet with each hotel partner and gain understanding of these differences. Culture is crucial to hotels; for example, it is very important to know what makes the Ritz Carlton, the Ritz Carlton, and what makes it different from every other hotel.

**Career Center as a partner**

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.



## 2. Career Coaching

### Model design

- a. Recruitment for career coaching is most effective when there is direct contact between the career coach and the potential participants. It enables workers to make a connection with the coach, increases clarity regarding what the coach does, and promotes follow through.
- b. High level of employee motivation is tied to completing career coaching sessions quickly, within a projected timeframe, rather than being offered in a drawn out process. Also meeting more often leads to faster progress. Participants who met with the career coach twice a month generally showed faster progress than those who met irregularly and lost momentum.
- c. Participants should be active throughout the career coaching process to reap skill gains and feel ownership.
- d. Employees should be encouraged to develop their own skills rather than relying on the career coach to do the work. It is important for the participant to set the agenda and come to each session with an issue to discuss in order to develop a sense of initiative and ownership of the process.
- e. Although insight into personal barriers has to be developed before career development can occur, it is important that the work be focused on the present and moves toward a clear vision for his/her desired future.
- f. It is crucial to have the support of supervisors since they can make it difficult for the career coach to meet with employees if they are not on-board. It was useful to introduce the project to the supervisors before meeting with employees, and to continue to develop relationships with them through one-on-one meetings. They need to see the benefit of worker's participation, along with the demands it places.
- g. In order to maintain the schedule, a career coach must be flexible, vigilant about confirming appointments and committed to regular email contact with participants.

### Importance of one-on-one coaching.

- a. While group activities are important, program leaders believe that without the one-on-one support provided by the coach, many of the most vulnerable students would have lost their way. By pairing career coaching services with support group, and pre-college classes, employee's learning is reinforced.
- b. Coaching is a staff-intensive investment, but critical to helping employees with the following kinds of issues: a) helping to resolve bureaucratic roadblocks b) helping students to regain their focus and develop a success strategy after failing an exam or being rejected from a program c) providing a consistent presence, engaged intensively with those who need the most help and encouraging and supportive of those who are on track and need minimal assistance.

### Augment coaching with exposure to other professionals.

These professionals can address the students' concerns and interests in a way that would be difficult for the coach. For example, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center arranged for a Surgical Technologist who was

studying to become a nurse to speak to a group about their health care career as a series of steps, rather than one rigid objective.



### **3. Curricula Development, Instruction, Delivery**

#### **Encourage partner recommendations and utilize them in course design.**

a. The more innovative and contemporary the program, the more education, support and collaboration will be needed between the college, partners, and the internship site.

b. By listening to the partners in human services, for example, planners learned that an internship would work best if the students could be available to the site from the beginning of the program; for example, the intern could work at the site one day a week for six months. That way, learning would take place incrementally, both in the classroom and in the field.

#### **Develop training courses and curricula that are aimed at the target audience.**

Employers should conduct a needs analysis of employee skills, deficits and future expectations of employees, both internally and through accrediting bodies. Involvement of supervisors should begin during grant development to ensure that the design of training courses is responsive to the needs of their departments.

#### **Recognize of the benefit of training to the organization, not just the employee.**

Training needs to be integrated into the overall goals and strategy of the organization through meaningful curricula. Work with employers to ensure that training will meet their needs, (increase productivity, decrease turnover, provide a pipeline of dedicated and well-trained staff to fill vacancies, especially in positions with high levels of shortages, etc.). If these needs are identified and guide training design, high enrollment and completion rates will follow naturally.

#### **Need for flexibility in workshop design and requirements.**

a. Attempt to schedule these workshops around students' schedules and host them in a location that is convenient and accessible. Often it is impossible for all students to be free for the same two-hour block in a given month. Offer multiple sessions of the same workshop, giving students the option to select one that fits with their schedule.

b. Another approach is to offer students a menu of workshops throughout the year. Students can attend a subset of these workshops that were of most interest to them, or best fit their schedule. It might also make sense to organize smaller group workshops, even one-on-one sessions.

c. Combining the strong academic offerings of a college with the community outreach, case management and life skills training/expertise of a CBO can make for a successful program with excellent recruitment and outcome potential.

#### **Benefits of an open admissions process.**

"Rolling admissions" capacity can help to spread out the job placement activity so that program staff are not attempting to find a large number of jobs that provide schedule flexibility and fit students' qualifications all at the same time.

#### **Instruction and implementation**

- a. It is important to clarify and find balance between institutional needs (getting a project done) and learning needs (working with people in actual supervisory position). The instructor and planners need to research the participants and the businesses at which they are employed.
- b. Provide participants with positive examples of leadership from the community. It is very helpful to have guest speakers from around the community talking about their leadership styles, roles, accomplishments, and responsibilities.
- c. Have participants provide feedback through evaluations at the end of each session. These evaluations highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of each session and allow the program leaders to develop future successful programs.
- d. Engage participants' supervisors in the training and curriculum. Training is a benefit only if the participants take what they have learned and apply it to their job responsibilities immediately. One way to promote this success, is to develop a "supervisor's briefing." Participation of the supervisors enables the participants and their supervisors to develop goals based on the leadership training and connect them to their job responsibilities.
- e. The creation of learning contracts is one effective approach often used to foster participants' taking responsibility. In adult education, contracts have been identified as a most effective technique for assisting students to diagnose their learning needs, plan learning activities, and select relevant resources.
- f. When selecting candidates, consideration must be given to their commitment, attitude, and work ethic. Positive attitude, initiative, strong work ethic, and willingness to take risks greatly determine participants' success. Participants who sit back with a sense of entitlement are less likely to secure employment after an internship.



## 4. Trainee Support

### **Demands on trainees.**

Demanding work and family schedules limit many employees' abilities to invest in their careers. Many are single parents with full-time responsibilities for maintaining a home and looking after their children. These factors need to be taken into account with course design, supports, and when evaluating a participant's motivation and level of participation.

### **Leadership support.**

It is crucial that the leadership of each participating employer commit to the training and release time involved. A committed leader 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.

### **Be responsive.**

When targeting a very challenging population to serve, such as the homeless population, build flexibility into the program. If you create strict policies, be sure to add the right supports and case management, to increase success. Know your bottom lines and where your program will flex. At the beginning of a new program, monitor everything, and closely. When a problem arises, be prepared to make changes quickly.

**Investing in support services enables student success in the college course.**

- a. Allot specific time for the students to work on their college homework in a group setting and to receive assistance from the classroom instructor while they did so. Include discussions on career advancement and the importance of working towards a college degree as part of the internship seminars.
- b. With regard to post-graduate support, ideas include working with the college to provide childcare on-site in the evenings, holding regular alumni support sessions, better informing students about the support services, and creating a buddy or mentor system
- c. Lack of a driver's license greatly impacts low-income individuals.
- d. Employers in the Human Services sector are required by state law and regulation to bar from employment individuals with specific criminal histories. They use the CORI review process to determine whether candidates are "employable." Many of the candidates either are not aware of negative CORI reports or do not understand exactly what background information might be reported on a CORI report. In some cases, CORI reports that highlight unpaid court fees or other small infractions and they become barriers to employment. Program staff need to help potential candidates understand the process and requirements.



## **5. Worker Issues**

### **College preparation classes for workers**

**Customize teaching to the academic levels of students.**

If basic math concepts are not mastered, for example, many adults may have difficulty moving on to more advanced math applications. Success in more advanced math requires that a person be able to follow multi-step procedures. For some adults, it may be hard to visualize patterns or to identify critical information needed to solve equations and more complex problems. Introduce new skills beginning with concrete examples and later moving to more abstract applications.

**Language skills enable math learning.**

Without the proper vocabulary and a clear understanding of what the words represent, it is difficult to build on math knowledge. For language difficulties, explain ideas and problems clearly and encourage students to ask questions as they work.

**Repeat and practice.**

Repeated reinforcement and specific practice of straightforward ideas can make understanding easier and retention more likely.

**Self-knowledge is key to learning.**

Help students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Understanding how one learns best is a big step in achieving academic success and confidence.

**Success in classes is due to many factors.**

High attendance rates, commitment to and focus on learning, use of proper study and time management skills, use of work-related scenarios/ materials, group assignments and the creation of study groups all have proven to be instrumental to the students' success.

**Financial assistance would enable more students to become nurses.** Faculty representatives have pointed out that financial assistance for students, including health insurance benefits, is still needed. Additional support in the form of assistance with health insurance costs, child care costs, payment of tuition for non-nursing curriculum, and payment for supplies (books, for example) would enable more workers to pursue degrees and licensure. Stipends that would allow students to work fewer hours are recommended as well.

## **Support for low-income women**

- a. Workforce development programs benefit from recognizing and understanding the unique, multicultural needs of the targeted population and design programming to meet those needs.
- b. There is a need for a careful intake assessment and screening that is clinically informed and ongoing throughout program. Also programs serving homeless, low-income, and welfare-recipient populations should have clinical support to decrease dropout rates and improve success rates for participants.
- c. There is a need to be thoughtful regarding the integration of clinical support and workforce development to guard against probing too deeply or minimizing important risk factors. Workforce development staff need to learn how best to talk with participants about mental health issues to ensure they will self-disclose their needs and follow through on services.
- d. There is a need for a flexible workforce development model to fit the varied needs of women on welfare. While some women can move swiftly through the traditional program into full-time employment, others require a phased approach allowing for EAP-type clinical/recovery support, enhanced skill development, and part-time employment options to provide time to acculturate to the world of work.

## **Mature Worker Issues**

### **Needs and motivators**

- a. Many mature workers have dismissed their own needs and desires for so long that they have difficulty at first permitting themselves to examine long buried dreams. Given a supportive learning environment, they will step up to the opportunity.
- b. Mature workers are guided by their values, hence the need for a values-based job search approach. They want jobs that have meaning and that contribute to society. Most expect to work into their seventies, money flexibility, and benefits being the driving motivations.

### **Program design, expectations of mature workers**

Training must be relevant and real. Mature workers must be willing to examine all job opportunities, and be ready to accept less than ideal jobs in order to get started. They must also be prepared to give more than expected and allow time for their employers to appreciate their contributions, before asking for more compensation.

