

San Mateo County's "Life After the Layoff" Campaign: Strategic Partnering of Job Seeker and Employer Services

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The San Mateo County Workforce Investment Board in conjunction with PeninsulaWorks and Full Capacity Marketing, Inc. implemented a successful re-employment campaign for dislocated workers. The campaign, entitled "Life after the Layoff," provides dislocated workers, those who have been laid off from their job due to a reduction of staff or a plant closure, with re-employment tools and strategies. The campaign features an event attended by a laid-off worker, employers and career counselors from PeninsulaWorks. The goal of the event is to engage two crucial aspects of workforce development, the "demand side" (employers) with the "supply side" (job seekers). The success of this event has led to the focus of my case study on how a one-Stop Career Center can serve as an important link and bridge between job seekers and employers and to understand how an active partnership can thrive and benefit both job seeker and employer.

Recommendations

The primary recommendation for Santa Cruz County is to develop a strategic marketing plan, emphasizing buy-in from internal customers while utilizing a broad range of traditional and innovative marketing strategies. Additionally, in collaboration with employers, the county can develop sustaining partnerships to address workforce needs.

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Introduction

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) directive WIABO 6-36, issued March 20, 2007 and effective January 1, 2007, imposes state-level requirements pertaining to WIA policies and procedures. California Senate Bill (SB) 293 amends California Unemployment Insurance (UI) Code 14000-14500. The changes require Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) to amend existing policies and procedures and in some cases create new policies and procedures pertaining to WIA-funded activities. There exists several activities under WIA, but for purposes of this study, I am only focusing on Business Services which are summarized in the WIA directive to include the following:

- Recruitment and staffing services;
- Training and development;
- Information about resources, outplacement services, and business retention;
- Employer access to comprehensive career and labor market information;
- Job placement;
- Economic development information; and
- Performance and program information on services provided.

WIA funded One-Stops/Career Centers offer Business Services to employers but often the services across centers are inconsistent and not standardized. Typical Business Services are segmented into the following categories:

- Recruitment services;
- Education and training services;
- Layoff assistance services; and
- Information and resource services.

Background

One-Stop/Career Centers typically are seen by the community as providing services for job seekers. San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County promote their Career Center Services to both job seekers and employers, yet both struggle to some degree in engaging employers. This dilemma is not unique and represents a universal struggle facing WIA funded programs. With limited resources, job seekers continue to be the primary customer of One-Stop services but in order to really make lasting economic impact, investment in the demand side (employers) is key to a better workforce for the community.

The formula for success in becoming a demand-driven system begins by identifying current and future staffing needs in one's community through an understanding of what employers look for when hiring entry and advanced positions. Engaging in this dialogue is critical. This conversation helps in directing service priorities and program emphasis and is instrumental in preparing job seekers for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This knowledge, in turn, helps local educational institutions plan and develop curriculum and training that meet job seekers' future career opportunities and regional employers' economic potential. The concept of "growing your own workforce" sustains, strengthens and expands the local economy. Being in the business of career development as a One-Stop is really a business that is about building community economic vitality. We can no longer be just about managing programs at our One-Stop centers but about building the workforce. Operationally, and to meet our community obligation, Business Services must be an

integrated and integral part of who we are, what we are and why we exist.

In speaking with Fred Sloan, San Mateo Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Director, about the success of the “Life After the Lay-off” campaign, he emphasized the importance of Business Services buy-in by the organization, staff, management and ultimately the Workforce Investment Board (WIB).

Buy-in from all parties is often difficult as by design, the Workforce Investment Act is a performance-based program. Resources are allocated to those services that are outcome-based. Business Services have no performance measures. It requires a leap of faith that supporting services to an employer will, in the long run, benefit job seekers. It also means taking risks. The question becomes, can you take risks and still get a return on investment that will sustain and advance a program? And what are the steps to move from a vision to a concrete plan?

Developing a Plan of Integration: The “Campaign”

The San Mateo County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) serves as the advisory board for PeninsulaWorks. The board is made up primarily of business leaders volunteering their time and expertise to ensure WIA funds are spent wisely to support San Mateo’s economic growth.

The WIB committed to addressing how to improve the PeninsulaWork’s brand recognition. Many One-Stop centers suffer from being “the best kept secret in town.” San Mateo was interested in changing the perception of One-Stop centers in the community. They were also interested in linking job seekers and employers and specifically re-connecting dislocated workers to jobs.

By the end of 2005, San Mateo County was fast approaching over 3,000 laid off workers. Many businesses had been affected, and many household were facing financial hardship. Dislocated workers, many who had worked in the same jobs for decades, were faced with the daunting task of finding employment without the resources or the tools to do so.

PeninsulaWorks had the resources, tools and services to assist these individuals but needed a new

approach to reach these laid-off workers. The WIB invested in the services of Full Capacity Marketing, Inc. to assist them in launching a new approach to working effectively with laid-off workers. The campaign has four objectives:

- 1 Develop and implement a proactive approach to Rapid Response Services (services to dislocated workers);
- 2 Develop partnerships to support outreach and promotion of the service;
- 3 Develop and utilize an integrated media campaign to support operational goals; and
- 4 Develop mechanisms to determine success and lessons learned.

Reasons for embarking on this campaign included:

- Increasing the number of dislocated workers served;
- Supporting operational goals and purpose;
- Addressing the awareness issue (Is the community aware of the services and their value?);
- Gaining a better insight into customer needs;
- and
- Engaging employers with the workforce system.

Clarifying the “why” helped develop the key components of the campaign. These included:

- Clearly defining the vision (What would be the scope of the campaign?);
- Conducting objective research (Would a new approach to service provision meet the needs of the target audience?);
- Defining the audience (e.g. job seekers, employers, community and staff);
- Defining metrics (How would success be defined and measured? How would we determine if we hit “our mark”?);
- Exploring market and outreach (What strategies would we employ that would be innovative and target our defined audiences?);
- Selling the vision (How would we move from ideas to plan to successful implementation?).

In speaking with the Rapid Response Coordinator for San Mateo County, Betty Wang, she emphasized how important the branding of the services was

primarily to staff who worked out of PeninsulaWorks One-Stops. Getting staff buy-in and understanding of the importance of employer services was key.

Internal Customer Buy-In

Internal communication about the strategic importance of Business Services to the staff of the One-Stop delivery system is fundamental to creating opportunities to improve services to employers.

San Mateo, in developing their campaign, utilized staff briefings to engage staff in dialogue about their role in the campaign. "Job squads" were formed and their role was to assess WIA eligibility for dislocated workers (DW) and service determination. Enrollment into services took place at the event.

The Business Networking and Resource Event

"Mini-orientations" introduced the target audience (dislocated workers) to the services of the One-Stop centers, effectively sold the benefits of the services through rapid engagement and delivery, and quickly helped foster a relationship with the customer which allowed for improved follow-up with customers after the event.

Over 200 job seekers attended the event with approximately 72% of the attendees indicating they were laid off. Of these, 90% were interested in participating in services at One-Stop centers. In addition to the job seekers attending, thirty businesses were represented at the Business Networking and Resource event. Employers attending were new business contacts, it presented an opportunity to present the services of the One-Stop to local employers. Thirteen of the local chamber of commerce organizations promoted the event through newsletter articles, web site promotion, and brochure distribution to members.

The success of the event was due to the ability to leverage the involvement of key players, staff, employers, community leaders and media. The event energized customers, staff, and partners, and it improved community awareness and knowledge of the One-Stop services. The long term benefits are the renewed strategic partnerships and commitment to future events.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The identified challenges in implementing a sustainable marketing plan to promote Business Services through the One-Stop Delivery System included the capacity to:

- Clearly identify, define and prioritize the services that can be successfully delivered and that provide employers with what they want and need;
- Recognize the importance of employer services and foster buy-in across the organization to see these services as enhancing what is offered to job seekers and not competing with traditional job seeker services;
- Improve "brand" recognition that uniquely identified the organization and consistently utilized in internal and external promotion, the program, services, and organization; and
- Provided commitment and resource allocation to Business Services by the organization given limited or no funding;
- It should also be noted that no Business Services performance measures currently exist in WIA legislation. Evaluation of services requires locally defined priorities.
- It is also important to recognize that limited resources often create competing service priorities and a dynamic tension between Job Seeker Services and Business Services.

Conclusion

The success of the "Life After the Lay-off" campaign can be attributed to the efforts directed internally to ensure staff consistency of message to the public regarding services offered to employers. Targeting the "marketing" message to staff and engaging all levels of the organization in the campaign created a sense of cohesion of purpose. This was key before any of the traditional marketing campaign strategies could take off.

Recommendations and Next Steps for Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County has begun the necessary steps to improve and promote services to employers. In June

of 2006, a consultant was hired to assess and make recommendations on the current Workforce Santa Cruz County Business Services model. One of the recommendations was to develop a unified marketing strategy. The identification and prioritizing of this recommendation in the report confirms the organization's recognition and commitment to this task. The lessons learned through my review of San Mateo County's Campaign will serve San Mateo County well. The emphasis is on internal customers' understanding, knowledge, support and promotion of Business Services. In Santa Cruz, we have begun this through an initiative to move to a more business-focused model of service delivery. Through the consultant's report, we have found that current businesses do not understand what services are available and how to access the services. Solutions to this challenge will be to brand the Workforce Santa Cruz, creating a logo recognized by business and promote this in a strategic marketing plan. Included in this plan would be efforts to:

- Market internally so that staff know who they are before they can become part of the public identity. This will require training to understand the role of business in Career Center Services;
- Update and improve website with clearly defined employer services, how to access and what are the benefits and value added of these services to employers;
- Create a new brochure and/or printed materials using a professional marketing consultant;
- Develop a campaign to launch new brand complete with timelines, deliverables, and defined metrics for success;
- Develop a mechanism for employer feedback and adjust service priorities, as needed, to meet customer needs and within resource capability;
- Track outcomes, successes, and employer testimonials; and
- Celebrate successes and encourage ongoing improvement of services and innovative promotion campaigns.

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