Collecting Participant Wage Data

Case Study Report

The National Information, Security, and Geospatial Technology Consortium (NISGTC)

Collin College (Consortium)

McKinney, TX

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Program Overview:
The National Information, Security, and Geospatial Technologies Consortium (NISGTC) expands and improves each consortium members’ ability to prepare students for high-wage, high-demand occupations by providing quality education and training programs that deliver on requisite skills, degree completion and IT credentialing.

The NISGTC has four Business and Industry Leadership Teams (BILTs) that meet quarterly to guide the work of the consortium in IT specialty areas: Programming (including Mobile Apps, Database, and Business Intelligence), Networking and Convergence Technology, Cybersecurity, and Geospatial Technologies.

The NISGTC BILT model is based on the work of the NSF Convergence Technology Center’s BILT that has guided the work of that Center for over 10 years. The BILT defines the knowledge, skills, and abilities business representatives want to see in prospective employees. It also assists the colleges in numerous ways by including student recruitment and hiring, class presentations and keynotes at conferences, traditional internships, and now virtual internship/externship experiences using business mentors. These programs are delivered to trade impacted and other at-risk populations.

Consortium Members:
Collin College, Bunker Hill Community College, Moraine Valley Community College, Del Mar College, Salt Lake Community College, Bellevue College, Rio Salado College

Key Partners:
AMX, Capital One, Comerica Bank, RealNetworks/ GameHouse, Drugstore.com, Microsoft Corporation, Timeslice, Access Technologies, IBM, Microsoft, Marlin Mobile, Avetec, TechAmerica Foundation, Cisco, Dell, HP, Capnor USA, 3d Laser Survey, Texas Dept. of Transportation, Frontier Surveying, InterLink, Dell Secure Works, Network Development Group, EMC Corporation, VMware IT Academy, Cox Communications, Commerce Real Estate, SLC, Utah Automated Geographic Ref Ctr. Worksource, Hoplink, New England Center for Homeless Veterans, The PIC – Private Industry Council, Massachusetts High Technology Council, TechAmerica, North Central TX Council of Government, TX Workforce Commission, Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend, President’s Office of Employment Training (POET), The National ABLE Network, Arizona Workforce Connection, Maricopa County Workforce Development Board, SBA Arizona District Office, Salt Lake Department of Workforce Services

NISGT CONSORTIUM HIGHLIGHTS:

Type of Grant: U.S. DOL TAACCCT Grant

Industry Focus: Information Technology

Period of Performance: 10/01/2011 – 09/30/2015

Grant Amount Awarded: $19,998,974

Leveraged Resources: College Resources & Overhead; External in-kind donations
Identifying and Overcoming Challenges

Initial Challenge: Identifying a Contact in Each State for Participant Data
The consortium includes seven colleges from six different states with different rules and restrictions regarding data access. For this reason, it was not possible to ask states to pull down neatly aggregated data that could easily be reported-out. Additionally, within each state it was difficult to find the correct person with the proper access to the data.

Overcoming the Challenge:
Tenacity was key. The consortium allotted a great deal of manpower to data collection and kept searching until the correct contacts were identified. Partnering with state Workforce agencies for data collection was helpful because of their increased access to employment and wage data.

Initial Challenge: Obtaining the Correct Data Access Authorization
In most states, in order to access both student information and state-held wage data, consent that satisfied both the privacy of student education records through Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and protected SSN information had to be obtained.

Overcoming the Challenge:
As Round I recipients who operate across states, NISGTC was required to problem-solve creatively. Once specific obstacles were identified by the state, they were addressed head-on. In one instance, this meant issuing amended consent forms to students for resubmission. In another, they have to develop workarounds (e.g., sending SSN and proxy ID to the state, but only receiving the proxy ID’d data back from the state). NISGTC was proactive in sharing revised consent forms and contact data with Round II & III grantees.

Initial Challenge: Painting the Full Picture
Data reporting needed to be integrated into marketing and PR efforts across states.

Overcoming the Challenge:
This consortium has collected both quantitative and qualitative data that reflect the myriad successes of the grant resources. Data is critical to building the case for long-term program sustainability within the college after the life of the grant.
Activity Analysis: How activities can impact the outcomes and deliverables of your grant program.

Activity: Deliver Virtual Lab Curricula and Platform for Consortium Partners & Affiliated Colleges

All seven colleges have been equipped with virtual laboratories whereby students can model “real world” lab assignments. With internet access, these labs can be done any time and any place. Offering nearly two hundred new virtual labs moved portions of traditional classroom learning out of the lab space. This in turn, freed up more “brick & mortar” space for class scheduling. The end result is that colleges are able to offer more classes and services to a greater number of students.

Activity: Improve Alignment of Curriculum with National IT Competency Models and Industry

All colleges in the consortium transitioned to a curriculum that incorporates the Business and Industry Leadership Team (BILT) model. NISGTC engaged a national business team of 185 industry members specializing in networking, programming, geographic information systems (GIS) and cybersecurity to define the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) needed to ensure that their students were employable at the end of their 12-36 month education. They also leverage the BILT resources to forecast industry trends, facilitate mock interviews, mentor virtual internship/externships, and to aide in job placement.

Faculty assessed courses against the BILT established KSAs and developed and shared new curriculum to fill in gaps. NISGTC continues to improve the stackable certificates embedded into the curriculum (60+ across consortium).

Activity: Virtual Mentoring & Intern/Externships

The virtual internship/externship pairs BILT members with a class, via webinar, to provide mentorship for small-group capstone projects. This bolsters the “real-world” experience for the student and also allows the course instructor to keep current with industry trends and the necessary skills. Flexibility is crucial for TAA students and others who frequently come to these academic programs with jobs and family responsibilities. Often, they cannot take time off to complete the types of traditional internships that make resumes stand out during the hiring process.

Q: You mentioned that consortium leads continue to look for ways to underscore the impact of TAACCCT money. Can you give a specific example?

A: At the outset, we did not understand that any student who was working even a few hours a week at a minimum wage job and transitioned into a new job as a direct result of their education was considered an incumbent worker. For example, one of our students went from part-time retail sales to working as a network engineer. This was a $30K pay increase that did not “count” under the employment line item on the APR, but was a great success, nonetheless.

Q: Taking the time to build a National Business and Industry Leadership Team delayed curriculum development. Was it worth the time to overhaul the existing curriculum?

A: The BILT process was time-consuming, but it ensured that the students would have the appropriate knowledge to be workforce ready upon graduation. NISGTC is seeing BILT members heavily involved with student job placement because the curriculum was designed to their specifications.
Key Lessons Learned:

- Pre-determine what & how data will be obtained and managed
- Leverage relationships with Workforce to access wage data
- Obtain the appropriate permissions in advance
- Identify all relevant data points that will support programming long-term. Know how to obtain data and budget for the human capital needed to complete reporting.
- Fully utilize relationships with statewide Workforce agencies to assist in the data collection process.
- Research and obtain the necessary data collection permissions from the student and the state at project outset.
- Look to original grantees and DOL for assistance with contact information and authorization/release forms.
- Have a system in place for data storage. Several of the colleges in NISGTC transitioned to a program called Track Via which has been integrated with the colleges’ Student Information System. This proved very helpful in tracking which students were close to completing their program of study and therefore ready to earn new wages.

Strategies for Sustainability:

Strategy: Capacity Building
Grant resources were invested in equipment, technology such as the virtual labs, curriculum and other supplies which have long-term benefits. This created a strong foundation for continued growth and innovation. The virtual labs change the face of classroom usage and will allow for a dramatic increase in the number of classes taught once the instructors fully adopt using them.

Strategy: Improving Retention and Reducing Time to Completion
The data suggests that program initiatives such as IT-Specific Tutoring for students and Career Coaching have had a direct impact on degree and certificate completion within consortium colleges. A robust data analytics system helps to build the case for retaining the support staff positions critical to the success of this initiative.

Strategy 3: Market Specific Curriculum
This consortium spans six states with varying job markets. Working with BILT industry partners, NISGTC has identified the specific job demands for each of the four IT career tracks. Local and regional BILT teams adapted national requirements to meet local needs. The consortium then adjusted certificates and degree program offerings.

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accordingly. This directly impacted success in local job placement.

**Keys to Replication:**

NISGTC partnered with national businesses to identify the knowledge areas required to ensure that their certificate and degree graduates are readily employable in IT upon completion of training. NISGTC attempts to align curriculum and learning experiences to meet national business demands. Project directors and managers committed themselves to implementing cutting-edge and innovative interventions to help students better prepare for the world of work. They also provided specialized tutoring, career coaching, mentoring, and placement services to improve student outcomes.

A cornerstone of their success is the strong industry support in the form of BILTs which meet quarterly to guide the work of the consortium in four IT specialty areas. The team is comprised of high-level executives with extensive technical skill as well as technicians from large corporations and regional companies who understand the current trends of the industry. They supply projections for job growth that influence NISGTC College’s career services efforts.

Program initiatives like career coaching and content specific tutoring that were made possible by grant resources, were vital to the success of the students. Data collection was integral to telling the story of that success. It is critical to capture metrics on the student impact of each grant funded position and intervention from the beginning of the grant. This will help college administration make future decisions about which grant funded employee positions and programs to absorb into the operating budget at grant completion.

Look beyond the scope of outcome numbers to build the most extensive quantitative and qualitative success profile possible. The grant benefits TAA workers, veterans, women, minorities and non-traditional students who often must work to support themselves and their families during their education. Plan ahead to track the increase in wages of these incumbent workers as well as the newly employed. Most importantly, use your data to assist in student recruitment and long-term program sustainability.

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