Working with the Public Workforce System: Obtaining TAA Participants

Case Study Report

Oregon Credentials, Acceleration, and Support for Employment (CASE) Consortium
Clackamas Community College
Oregon City, Oregon

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Program Overview:
CASE is a statewide collaboration that includes all 17 community colleges in Oregon, the Oregon Employment Department (OED), Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), employers and community partners united by core beliefs that postsecondary credentials are the gateway to living-wage jobs and the foundation of Oregon’s future economic success.

The project’s “three ‘C’ strategies” expand and enhance Career Pathways as a vehicle to increase credential completion and accelerate time to completion. The strategy uses Career Coaches to reduce barriers so that students enroll, persist, complete a credential, and secure employment in a demand occupation. CASE launched the development of a "portable" approach to granting Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) for students and workers across the state. Emphasis has been placed on improving coordination with Oregon's Trade Act representatives and the public workforce providers.

The CASE grant has overcome barriers and challenges to produce promising figures and participant successes. The CASE project is currently at 86% of its 3-year participant goal and already has a number of students acquiring job positions. CASE is also currently on track to complete all of its non-participant deliverables as projected. The Management Team spent considerable time developing a “logic model” to guide planning and has used the model as a tool for the third-party evaluation baseline assessment.

Consortium Members:
Blue Mountain Community College; Central Oregon Community College; Chemeketa Community College; Clatsop Community College; Columbia Gorge Community College; Klamath Community College; Lane Community College; Linn-Benton Community College; Mt. Hood Community College; Oregon Coast Community College; Portland Community College; Rogue Community College; Southwestern Oregon Community College; Tillamook Bay Community College; Treasure Valley Community College; and Umpqua Community College

Key Partners:
Samaritan Health Services; Hampton Affiliates/Tillamook Lumber; Samaritan North Lincoln Hospital; City of Rockaway Beach; J&H Boat Works; City of Lincoln City; North Wasco County School District; Pacific Office Automation; Blount Industries; Sulzer Pumps; Samaritan Pacific Communities Hospital; Clackamas Community College

CASE CONSORTIUM HIGHLIGHTS:
Type of Grant: TAACCCT Grant
Industry Focus: Manufacturing
Period of Performance: 10/1/2011-09/30/2015
Grant Amount Awarded: $18,679,289
Identifying and Overcoming Challenges

Initial Challenge: Finding Eligible Students

At the college and in the workforce region, it was difficult to determine which students were Trade Adjustment Assistant (TAA) eligible. Thus, identifying methods to determine TAA eligibility proved to be one of the greatest challenges.

Overcoming the Challenge: Trade Act Unit Involvement

The CASE project was fortunate to have Trade Act Unit management directly involved in the planning process of the grant project. Working together early-on in the project development phase allowed for greater coordination efforts to identify a target population. Together, the parties developed an online database for each college that allowed for information sharing to identify program candidates.

Initial Challenge: Getting Students Involved

CASE was challenged by the lack of enthusiasm in the student population to participate in the grant project and work with career coaches. A new approach had to be formulated if the project was to take hold, students had wrongly identified the program as a bureaucratic barrier and not as a complimentary tool for success. There was also the question of students who were reluctant to explore unfamiliar programs or enroll in ones that were not their first choice.

Overcoming the Challenge: Communicating with Eligible Grantees

Project Managers partnered with liaisons that worked closely with contacts at the Central Trade Act Office. Through these partnerships, case managers at the Trade Act Office were encouraged to advise TAA eligible students to work with college career coaches. A marketing campaign was used to describe the benefits of using career coaches. They encouraged students to schedule one-on-one sessions and to attend small intimate events on campus where they could really get to know the coaches. Students independently began spreading the word that a coach could help overcome common challenges as they navigated multiple agency demands and bureaucracies, thus leading to an increase in program participants.

Initial Challenge: Combating Expectations in Rural Areas

The CASE consortium found that rural regions do not often have a large number of TAA participants. Those that do are usually smaller colleges that do not offer a diverse range of training programs. Oregon is a very rural state, with several small community colleges and limited training programs.

Overcoming the Challenge: Speaking Out

CASE again looked to Trade Act Office case managers to advise students on availability of the TAACCCT grant program. Case managers directed TAA eligible students to career coaches that were equipped to fully describe the TAACCCT program and the application process. This has increased TAA eligible student participation and retention in rural areas.
Activity Analysis: How activities can impact the outcomes and deliverables of your grant program

Activity: Sustainable Relationships
The focus of the program was on building sustainable relationships with the management and staff of Oregon’s Central Trade Act Unit. The relationship between the parties led to the development of Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA’s), approved by TAA staff and the colleges, which facilitated an easy exchange of appropriate student information. CASE was able to identify, recruit, support, and transition TAA-eligible students into TAACCCT programs.

The positive relationship led to the training of over thirty career coaches and college staff in TAA policies and practices that directly translated into more effective recruitment of TAA eligible students.

Activity: Integrating Career Coaches
The successful integration of career coaches into the life of the individual colleges appears to have made a big difference in TAA-eligible student recruitment, retention and persistence to program completion. Many colleges are moving towards institutionalizing the career coach concept and/or role. CASE staff members are confident that career coaches will improve TAA recruitment and retention over time.

Activity: Credit-for-Prior-Learning
CASE has been instrumental in advancing the Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) agenda in Oregon. Oregon is building an accurate community college database for CPL; the consortium has participated in developing statewide CPL guidelines and is participating in a state-sponsored pilot of implementation of the CPL guidelines.

Dedicating resources to the development of CPL has made it a very promising tool in attracting TAA eligible participants. For unemployed workers who would like to have available options presented to them, CPL defines clear goals and markers that outlines students’ stackable credentials. The ease of the process has been effective in drawing student attention to CASE programs as they are given specific instruction and direction to the necessary curriculum that will translate to the attainment of a promising job upon completion.

Key Activities Used to Attract TAA Participants:
- **Strong Marketing Campaign**: Promote the benefits of enrollment to TAA eligible participants. Have enrolled students assist with outreach.
- **Offer Array of Programs**: Provide focused programs in a spectrum of fields to attract a larger number of TAA eligible participants.
- **Partner with TAA Office**: Create an agreement with local TAA Office to identify TAA eligible participants.
Key Lessons Learned:

Communication:
Creating a hierarchy of communication amongst consortium members at all levels proved successful. Incorporating weekly teleconferences, and quarterly, in person meetings, resolved many of the problems that initially plagued the program. Every staff member was assigned at least one other person to connect with throughout the year. Project managers and directors periodically check in to make sure that these communication quotas are being met.

Facilitating more frequent communication across the board has not only helped in each individual institution, but from a statewide perspective as well. It has been much easier to navigate the complexities when the entire state is on the same page. Improved communication between the consortium and state offices have increased cooperation in identifying a target list of TAA eligible participants for college outreach efforts.

One-on-one counseling:
By increasing attempts to provide personalized counseling to each potential student, more and more TAA eligible students are taking advantage and applying for the grant program. Having counselors speak directly with prospective grantees gives them an opportunity to share other available training options to the students. Counselors emphasize how continuing education and enrolling in training courses can provide both immediate and long-term benefits.

Strategies for Sustainability:

Strategy 1: TAA Involvement
Partner with Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to create a sustainable Intergovernmental Agreement that will exceed the life of the grant. The consortium has built personal relationships between college and TAA staff at each university to ensure that collaborative efforts flourish and are maintained.

As one of the keys to obtaining TAA eligible participants has been the collaborative work between the consortium and the TAA office, these efforts must be maintained and cultivated to ensure project sustainability. In addition, many non-grant staff have been trained in career coaching strategies and TAA processes to continue their work after the life of the grant.

Strategy 2: Building the Career Pathways Model
Integrating a career pathways model has been beneficial to drawing the interests of TAA participants. Working closely with the existing statewide Career Pathways Initiative, in particular, the outlining of a specific career pathway for the TAACCCT participants, seems to be improving student retention and persistence.

Strategy 3: Utilizing Career Coaches
The concept of a career coach model has gained acceptance across the consortium. Most of the colleges are looking at some way to sustain the concept/role, using college general fund dollars. The idea of a more intrusive, case-management style of advising is also gaining ground. Using Career Coaches and intrusive advising techniques simultaneously allows staff to take a more hands on approach in accommodating the college and career choices of TAA eligible participants, and help keep them on track towards graduation and job attainment.
Keys to Replication:

Maintain Open Communication
It is essential to maintain open communication with TAA partners from the onset of the project planning process. Consider having TAA partners become part of the management team to increase coordination efforts. If direct involvement cannot be achieved, hire a TAA liaison to work with the colleges and to train grantees and other college staff in TAA processes and procedures.

Create Strong Partnerships
Another important aspect is the development of an agreement for information sharing between TAA and the consortium. Shared learning, as well as informational and training sessions, may lead to greater cohesion amongst stakeholders. The CASE management team, including the TAA liaison, meets weekly via conference call. The implementation team meets every week with the management team via teleconference. The entire CASE staff is present during quarterly face-to-face meetings.

CASE staff believe that the TAA liaison plays an instrumental role in providing on-going technical assistance in recruitment, support strategies and employment strategies to college staff. Periodic visits to partner colleges could strengthen this project even more.

Emphasize Partner Accountability
When leading a consortium, partner accountability is critical to project success. CASE directors ensure that all seventeen partners report quarterly on a standardized template that includes TAACCCT numbers. If a member college (one who receives TAACCCT funding) is not performing to expectation, make a visit or call to find out what is happening. Provide technical assistance as needed. Schedule follow up meeting/call.

Create a Shareable Database for the Consortium
Obtain or develop sharable software where project data, training, recruiting ideas, recorded webinars information and other information material easily accessible to project staff. It is important to develop a confidential but manageable database as soon as the grant begins. Train staff and host training sessions throughout the year to ensure project cohesion.