Working with the Public Workforce: Workforce Investment Boards

Case Study Report

Air Washington Consortium
Spokane Community College
Spokane, Washington

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Program Overview:
The Air Washington (AW) project is a consortium of eleven of the state’s community and technical colleges. It was created to meet Washington State’s growing workforce demands in aerospace and its related businesses which represent more than one-tenth of the state’s GDP. With their employee partners, these colleges designed and delivered comprehensive, current, and innovative education, job skills, and services necessary to strengthen the statewide aerospace industry of 150+ partner companies through workforce training. To date, Air Washington campuses have trained more than 3,000 workers in advanced manufacturing/machining, aircraft assembly, aircraft maintenance, composites, and electronics.

Air Washington was able to accelerate the progress of low-skilled workers and those new to aerospace industry sectors. They strived to increase opportunities for TAA-eligible workers, women, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups in the aerospace fields. The consortium improved retention and achievement rates and reduced the average time of degree/certificate completion among students. They worked closely with workforce investment boards (WIBs) and industry to develop career pathways for their students post completion.

Consortium Members:
Big Bend Community College (BBCC); Skagit Valley College (SVC); Clover Park Technical College (CPTC); South Seattle Community College (SSCC); Edmonds Community College/Washington Aerospace Training and Research Center (EdCC/WATRC); Wenatchee Valley College (WVC); Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee (AJAC); Everett Community College (EvCC); Center of Excellence for Aerospace and Advanced Materials Manufacturing (EvCC/CoE); North Seattle Community College (NSCC); Olympic College (OC); Peninsula College (PC); Inland Northwest Aerospace Technology; Renton Technical College (RTC) Center (SCC/INATC)

AIR WASHINGTON HIGHLIGHTS:

Type of Grant: TAACCCT

Industry Focus: Aerospace

Period of Performance: 10/1/2011-09/30/2015

Grant Amount Awarded: $20,000,000

Leveraged Resources: Workforce & Industry resources
Key Partners:
**Employee Partners**: Absolute Aviation; Janicki Industries; Aerospace Futures Alliance (AFA); Pacific Northwest Aerospace Alliance; Angeles Composites Technology, Inc. (PNAA); The Boeing Company; Pacific Northwest Defense Coalition (PNDC); Inland Northwest Aerospace Consortium (INWAC); Profile Composites North America. **Project Partners**: International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (AIM) Local 751 and 160; Seven Local WIBS – the Workforce Development Centers (WDC)

Identifying and Overcoming Challenges

**Initial Challenge: Understanding the Uniqueness of WIB Partner Agencies**
Colleges and workforce agencies have always had similar end goals – to train and employ. However, the consortium learned that every local Workforce Development Center (WDC) had a slightly different way of doing business. It was important for all parties to define their role in a way that was beneficial and in-line with their business model.

**Overcoming the Challenge:**
To achieve optimal leveraging, the consortium approached their relationships with WIBs from the perspective of collaboration. They realized that being too scripted in the performance parameters would limit the success of these partnerships. Each individual college worked with their specific workforce agency to create a win-win situation.

**Initial Challenge: Developing Contracts and Defining Deliverables**
Air Washington needed to reconcile the higher education model of operating with the WDC model. As the colleges and their workforce partner agency often had administrative processes that were counterintuitive to one another, integrating systems was sometimes difficult. Additionally, because these were not consortium-wide “one size fits all” relationships, this also had to be done at the college level.

**Overcoming the Challenge:**
The colleges and WDCs spent time developing systems to meet the reporting requirements of both the Workforce Investment Act and the DOL TAACCCT grant specifications. Deliverables were assigned and realigned to best suit each college-workforce partnership. Barriers to success were defined and overcome. Extra processes were put in place to satisfy both partners, as required. Consortium leads also found that budget adjustments were sometimes necessary to satisfy the manpower needs once the roles of both parties were better understood.
Initial Challenge: Co-locating an Employee between Two Agencies

A navigator was put in place on each campus to serve as a recruiter and TAA/WIA service coordinator. This individual was co-located at the local workforce development center.

Overcoming the Challenge:
The navigators reported to their WDC, so it was important to develop an open line of communication with their WDC supervisors. The college had to learn WDC processes and make sure that navigators were set-up for success in terms of WDC expectations. Additionally, each navigator’s performance was measured against grant outcomes and deliverables.

Activity Analysis: How activities can impact the outcomes and deliverables of your grant program.

Activity: Expand and Improve Student Recruitment
Air Washington’s relationship with local WIBs allowed them increased access to TAA participants. By joining the statewide TAA newsletter list serve, the consortium was able to easily track which companies had become eligible. More important, WDC partners were able to join rapid response efforts with companies that were shutting down. They made immediate connections with employees and provided seamless transitions for those individuals into the AW degree or certificate program that would set them up for job success in the aerospace industry.

Activity: Co-locating of a WDC “Navigator”
Each campus had an on-site, grant funded navigator who provided three critical program functions for students: recruitment, retention, and employment. They provided inroads to the WDC system (e.g., holding program recruiting events at their WDC), brought participants to fill college cohorts, and expanded program capacities. They also leveraged resources to help students meet financial needs.

Navigators also played a key role in employer relationships. They not only helped with career placement but were also able to follow-up with industry employers to see how the AW students were performing in their new careers. Feedback was reported to college leadership which allowed for prompt curriculum updates as needed.

Activity: Leverage Workforce Resources
The relationship with state WDCs afforded AW the ability to leverage workforce funding for student retention and employer engagement. It bolstered each college’s ability to provide wrap-around services to those students who found that finances were a barrier to academic success. The AW colleges trained their navigators on education grants and funding options. The navigator combined that knowledge with their access to workforce funding to help students meet living and education costs which, in-turn, kept...
The navigators also used Workforce Investment Act (WIA) credits and On the Job Training (OJT) dollars to build promising relationships with employers and to make career connections for Air Washington graduates.

**Key Lessons Learned:**

- Seek a deep understanding of WIB resources, processes and needs prior to funding.
- Be flexible with the roles that your workforce partners will play across the consortium.
- Determine which party will be responsible for which outcomes and deliverables based on the needs of each college and workforce agency.
- Plan ahead and allot time and budget resources for aligning the databases and administrative systems of the colleges and the workforce centers.
- Leverage all workforce funding, resources and relationships (e.g., Industry partners, Economic Development Counsel, Chamber of Commerce, etc.) to maximize success.
- Determine a way to utilize the workforce database to collect DOL information to streamline data collection process.
- Incorporate an on-site workforce representative into campus program activities.
- Allow workforce representatives to take the lead on employer engagement for job placement. They are often able to bring additional resources and assets in which the college does not have access.

**Strategies for Sustainability:**

**Strategy 1: A strong “Recruit, Retain and Employ” Model**

Navigators enhanced Air Washington’s ability to recruit, retain, and employ their students. This correlated to larger cohorts and higher completion rates for their colleges. This also led to higher employment rates for the state workforce agencies.

**Strategy 2: Quantifying Program Successes**

Air Washington used their data effectively to create observable return on investments for workforce and industry partners. Specifically, it was important to capture the navigators’ achievements both qualitatively and quantitatively to underscore the value and impact on both parties’ bottom lines. This will build the case for maintaining these relationships in the future.

**Strategy 3: Creating Clear Career Pathways**

Working together benefits both Air Washington and their partnering Workforce Development Centers. The DOL ETA TAACCCT
taa.cct@dol.gov / www.doleta.gov/taaccct/
community sees the college as a place where individuals are “skilled-up” with new skills that translate to better jobs and higher wages. Employers will see the college as a place for their incumbent employees to gain new job skills. They will realize that they can leverage their resources.

**Keys to Replication:**

**Air Washington worked with state workforce agencies to understand their specific needs and to build stronger collaborative efforts.**

It is important to develop a good communication plan and ascertain, from the start, what the primary motivators are for workforce partners. Take time to fully meet each other’s needs and foster true collaboration with your workforce investment boards. Planning ahead will allow for the mutual integration of their methods and measures into grant activities. Recognize that it might take an extra step from the college to satisfy a workforce administrative requirement and vice versa. Identify barriers to success and eliminate them.

**Partner with WIBs to inform the community about college programs.**

As a result of Air Washington creating sector specific degree and certificate programs, workforce partners were central to educating people about the job opportunities the program created and the importance of those jobs. Utilizing workforce for recruitment and marketing strategies is integral. They will bring a different type of participant to the program. AW’s workforce navigators reached-out to TAA and other workers, identified how their current jobs skills translated to potential careers in the aerospace industry, and facilitated that transition.

**Integrating a navigator proved to be the best possible facilitator to integrate both parties.**

Navigators provided a positive return-on-investment of grant outcomes and deliverables, such as: increasing completion rates, improving existing relationships with employers, keeping programs full of qualified students, and placing graduates into jobs. They also helped the consortium cultivate new employer partnerships. In short, they brought workforce talents, knowledge, and database systems directly to campus.
Whether building a new relationship with workforce or improving upon existing relationships, look for opportunities to create mutually beneficial agreements. Consider how to leverage WIB goals to the college’s advantage and where training and employment partnerships can lead beyond grant completion.