# Colorado SECTORS Initiative: West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative

### MARCH 2013 CASE STUDY



Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey School of Management and Labor Relations 94 Rockafeller Road, Suite 104 Piscataway, NJ 08854 www.smlr.rutgers.edu

#### Prepared for:

Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) & The Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) 633 17th Street, Suite 1200 Denver, CO 80202



## **COLORADO'S SECTORS INITIATIVE**

In May 2009, The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) jointly awarded funding to super-regions throughout the state. Funding was provided to regional workforce partnerships to plan a sector strategy, and many of these grantees received additional funding for the implementation of these activities. Since 2009, ten grants have been awarded to target industries including aerospace, healthcare, manufacturing, renewable energy, and water/wastewater management. Sector initiatives are developed through local public-private partnerships, are industry focused, and include workforce development, economic development, education and other stakeholders to address high priority workforce challenges within an industry.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Southwest – Western Super-Region of Colorado¹ has a total population of 191,666. In 2011, the unemployment rates for the Southwest region and Western region were 8.3% and 9.5%, respectively.² Evaluators and partnership members ranked the following among the top five industry sectors in the region: Professional/Technical Services, Ambulatory Health Care Services, Specialty Trade Contractors, Construction of Buildings, and Oil and Gas Extraction/Mining.

The Southwest-Western Super-Region Healthcare Initiative was awarded a planning grant from CDLE to develop a sector strategy in healthcare. As part of a primary data collection process to learn more about the region, the partnership conducted surveys of 46 employers with at least 20 employees, one-on-one interviews, focus groups of 30 healthcare employers, and an online survey with 42 respondents who represented each of the sub-regions. Many stakeholders and partners across the super-region were involved in the planning phase. Super-region Economic Development professionals and Workforce Investment Board (WIB) members reviewed the data and concurred in identifying Hospital and Ambulatory Health Care Services as the target industry sector. Through research and discussion, the team recognized a strong need to increase access to training and availability of qualified candidates for the following occupations:

- Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)
- Medical Assistants
- Registered Nurses
- Specialty Allied Health Occupations

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Region Includes: Archuleta, LaPlata, San Juan, Montezuma, Dolores, Delta, Montrose, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Ouray, and San Miguel Counties

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Annual Not Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment data in Multiple Workforce Development Regions for 2010.

http://www.colmigateway.com/analyzer/qslabforcedata.asp?cat=HST\_EMP\_WAGE\_LAB\_FORCE&session=LABFOR CE&subsession=99&areaname=

Primary data analysis also revealed several barriers to implementing training. Although there were a variety of training needs, small staff sizes made it difficult for workers to find coverage if they were absent to attend training. Training was not locally available, and 50% of responders identified cost as a barrier to training. In addition to these training challenges, the team identified other more general challenges that surfaced from primary data analysis. Research indicated that recruitment and retention were major problem areas for the industry.

# **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

To address the identified workforce challenges, the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative identified the following project goals:

- Improve CNA and other entry-level worker preparation and retention by providing necessary and appropriate development training.
- Bring needed healthcare training opportunities to the local area and identify a long-term support plan.
- Develop a research report on effective practices to improve RN specialty experience and skills upgrade in rural regions.

The initiative ran from August 1, 2010 through June 30, 2012 with a strong emphasis on capacity building.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

The planning grant established a framework for partnership. This framework enabled the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative to continue the established collaboration, instead of having to begin anew by creating new partnerships. As work began on the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative, project team members held one in-person meeting in each sub region to receive feedback from partners and followed up to the broader partnership by phone. Project members met with 29 healthcare providers, two colleges, three hospitals, and several web-based and on-site training providers. These meetings enabled decision-making, facilitated research, and informed the trajectory of the initiative.

Although these meetings created meaningful opportunities to communicate about the sector strategy, the partnership faced several challenges. Due to staffing changes within the industry, active participation from some partners lapsed. Filling the important roles played by these partners was time consuming. The geographic location of partners also created problems, as the super-region is fairly vast, with intense and unpredictable weather creating challenging conditions that affected travel. Despite these delays, however, most partners remained engaged. New partners also emerged, enthusiastic about joining the efforts.

#### IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

#### **Training**

Working with Southwest Colorado Community College (SCCC), a branch of Pueblo Community College (PCC), the team adapted a soft skills training curriculum that the Pueblo Workforce Center (PWFC) routinely delivered to manufacturing workers. SCCC modified this curriculum to meet the needs of the healthcare sector. The college evaluated the project as the training was delivered. The grant coordinator along with an experienced adult educator partnered to conduct the training, which included four modules covering motivation (2 hours), willingness to learn (2 hours), dependability and reliability (2.5 hours), and planning and organization (2.5 hours). Three sites hosted the training: Four Corners Medical Healthcare, Valley Manor Healthcare Center, and Gunnison Valley Healthcare. Several incumbent workers completed the training in Durango, Montrose, and Gunnison.

The soft skills curriculum produced tremendous success. All interviewed participants expressed appreciation for the training and most cited specific examples of training components that were improving their daily job activities. Some employees expressed feeling valued by their employers because of the paid time provided to pursue training. Other staff articulated feeling more empowered in workplace decision-making. One individual noted that these feelings are important because patients receive better care when their caregiver feels confident and informed. At Four Corners Health Care, Durango, participants expressed finding the training enjoyable and relevant to their jobs. They also liked having a forum where they could discuss some of the challenges faced by CNAs. At Valley Manor Care Center, Montrose, participants indicated the training was both informative and fun. Communication, attitude, and team building surfaced as topics of interest in both Montrose and Durango. The third session, which saw the largest attendance, occurred at the Gunnison Valley Health Care facility. Twenty-four participants, including three supervisors and the CEO, attended. With each training, momentum gathered toward future adoption and sustainability. This positive feedback from participants validated employers' need for soft skills training.

Supervisors also observed changes in staff performance and attitude. One supervisor noted that after training, CNAs were more responsive to directions and were more open to talking about how to resolve issues that arise. Another supervisor discussed increased cohesiveness among staff of different generations. The emotional intelligence component of training also positively impacted employers, as one supervisor mentioned a previously difficult staff member who employed a positive approach after completing training.

Additional employers have stepped forward to request training. These new requests demonstrate the positive track record established by the soft skills curriculum. Mercy Medical Center has since taken the initiative to offer the classes at their own expense, further demonstrating the impact and reach of the project. There were also some hires reported as a result of EMS/EMT training through Delta/Montrose Technical College. Some grant funds

supported the purchase of equipment needed to provide this training. Equipment purchased included splint kits, pulse oximeters, blood glucose monitors, infant CPR manikins, and adult CPR manikins.

### Workforce Operations and Procedures

Three workforce centers in the Southwest region and three workforce centers in the Western region worked together closely on the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative. The WFCs had previously partnered to obtain an energy grant that encompassed both regions, which allowed their collaboration for this project to build off that prior experience rather than have to create new connections. The WFCs all share the same regional director, who provided grant oversight and helped recruit other healthcare sector partners. Trainings were promoted through the workforce centers which helped with participant recruitment, particularly for the EMT training.

#### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

One of the biggest impacts of the partnership was the introduction of sector initiatives to local employers. The concept created opportunities for collaboration and brought healthcare representatives together to identify common workforce challenges and needs. The sharing of information facilitated four additional significant partners joining the project.<sup>3</sup> The new partners are equipped with capabilities to deliver live video conferencing to eliminate geographical challenges, and two of these partners have courses and curricula that will apply in furthering the healthcare sector strategy.

Capacity building is a major success of the project. The infrastructure is now in place to innovate and improve training through assisted learning and other formats. This project also established a track record and testimonials, making it more viable to attract employers in identifying workforce needs and engaging in training.

## IMPACT / RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

ROI was not directly tracked by the partnership, but many employers and training participants expressed their satisfaction with the soft skills curriculum. Changes in morale and work styles were more visible among incumbent workers that took part in the training.

#### **CHALLENGES**

Challenges were faced by the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative through the grant period.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Archuleta County Education Center, Pagosa Springs High School, Unlimited Learning, Inc., and Archuleta County Department of Human Services

The hiring of the project coordinator was initially delayed due to a lack of qualified applicants. The project coordinator who was hired did not have previous experience with sector strategies and therefore required time to become familiar with concepts and partnerships throughout the region before implementing the intended initiatives. The initiative also faced delays due to payment processing, which required the completion of several forms and procedural steps. Challenges were also experienced with payment remittance as the process of documentation to the state was lengthy and unfamiliar. Initial plans to charge the employers a fee for providing training services backfired when no partners signed on, which further delayed the implementation of the project until all involved reached agreement.

The partnership also encountered a problem within the process of hiring a trainer. The grant had not initially planned to hire a trainer, but as the project evolved the need arose to find an individual that could provide soft skills training to incumbent workers in health care facilities. While the project coordinator was prepared to provide such trainings, ultimately the college identified the need to hire a trainer with more experience, delaying the timeline.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- **Hiring a coordinator as a first step** is beneficial to the partnership's strength and initiatives. The first quarter saw little activity due to the lack of a project coordinator.
- Establishing the roles and expected commitment of partners prior to the start of
  implementation activities reduces challenges and timeline delays. Challenges gaining
  employer buy-in with a fee for participation led the team to offer the courses at no cost
  to the employer.
- Timing of training is crucial to accommodate the needs and efficiency of employers'
  workforce schedules.
- Location for training requires planning in rural areas. Making the training convenient and easily accessible, as in the form of distance learning, might overcome this obstacle.
- **Pursuing multiple funding streams** became necessary, as challenges presented when trying to fund training opportunities for incumbent workers and job seekers.
- Establishing a track record of successful and impactful training opportunities made regional employers more willing to express interest in the partnership.

## **BEST PRACTICES**

 Conducting training with incumbent workers of varying levels of experience in the same training session increased a mutual understanding of the roles within the workplace.

- Hiring a trainer with experience in the subject matter made the trainings more useful and effective to participants.
- Having an administrator or supervisor participate in each class is important in facilitating cross communication among staff.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

While there are no ultimate plans for sustainability of the West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative under its current operation, some of the training will be continued by private employers such as Mercy Medical Center which will offer soft skills training to employees.

Additionally, the partnership was able to secure \$53,300 in leveraged resources for a fourth year from new educational partners. Partners involved in the healthcare initiative will move in a direction to train youth, TANF recipients, and other underserved populations. While the educational institutions have provided further funding, the initiative was not awarded further funding by CDLE.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Procedural Manual**: The provision of a procedural guide that details the process for budget modifications, procurement and payment requests would be very helpful.
- Evaluation: The introduction of the evaluation framework, access to evaluators and knowledge of evaluation metrics within the first six months of a grant project would facilitate the collection of needed data and documentation. It would also allow projects to use ongoing feedback to revise or refine project activities and thereby develop better projects and be more successful in achievement project goals.

## **ABOUT**

Rutgers University's School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school is comprised of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners. For more information, visit <a href="https://www.smlr.rutgers.edu">www.smlr.rutgers.edu</a>

## **AUTHORS**

Heather McKay

Suzanne Michael

Laura Barrett

Renée Edwards

Laura Stanik

#### **APPENDIX A**

#### West by Southwest Healthcare Initiative Partners:

- The Training Advantage WIA providers
- Region 9 Economic Development
- Southwest Colorado Community College
- Mercy Medical Center
- Pagosa Mountain Hospital
- Life Care, Inc.
- Four Corners OB/GYN
- Mesa State College/Montrose Center
- Alpine Home Health & Hospice
- Delta Area Economic Development Inc.
- Delta Montrose Technical College
- Volunteers of America
- Fourth year partners: Archuleta County Education Center; Pagosa Springs High School;
   Unlimited Learning, Inc.; and Archuleta County Dept. of Human Services.

## **APPENDIX B**

ACTIVITY	TOTAL PLANNED	TOTAL ACTUAL	% OF GOAL
Entered training	130	89	68%
Completed training	120	87	73%
Earned certificate or industry credential	80	86	108%