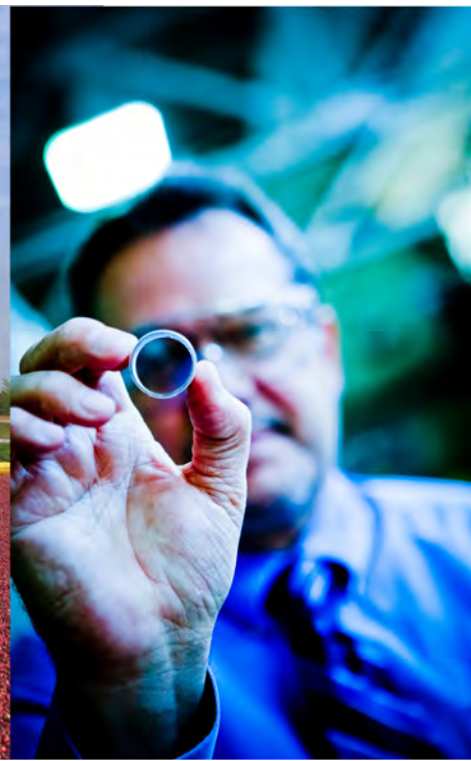


WORKFORCE CENTRAL



Evaluation | January 2012

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ABOUT COWS

COWS is a nonprofit think-and-do tank, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, that promotes “high road” solutions to social problems. These treat shared growth and opportunity, environmental sustainability, and resilient democratic institutions as necessary and achievable complements in human development. COWS is nonpartisan but values-based. We seek a world of equal opportunity and security for all.

© Center on Wisconsin Strategy
University of Wisconsin-Madison
1180 Observatory Drive
Madison, WI 53706
608.263.3889
www.cows.org

WORKFORCE CENTRAL

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OVERVIEW

As a grantee of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and the Social Innovation Fund, Workforce Central must participate in annual evaluations. This independent, local evaluation uses quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess progress made towards its “Ultimate Outcome”:

“Everyone in south Wood County who wants to work has ample opportunities to prepare for and secure a family-sustaining job and advance in a career over time. Current and prospective workers conveniently access a comprehensive, seamless array of education, training, and support services, provided by a strong partnership of employers, educators, and service providers that takes shared responsibility for a healthy workforce, economy, and job market.”

– Adopted February 2010

Workforce Central serves the greater south Wood County area, home to 43,083 people and covering 823 square miles in rural, central Wisconsin. Historically, two locally-owned paper companies drove the economy. Recent years have witnessed a shift towards other industries. Local industries experiencing expansion include advanced manufacturing, food processing, information technology, and health care.

The modest revitalization experienced by the business sector has not readily translated to economic opportunity for many south Wood County residents. At the height of the recession, the area’s unemployment rate was 10.8 percent. As noted by one local business owner:

“we’re opening a plant and we’re looking for people, and we’ve got unemployed people in the community but they are not skilled, and don’t have the tools we need, and we’re sitting here with nobody to fill these jobs and we’re going outside the community to hire.”

This skills gap between the workforce and available jobs contributed, in part, to an increased demand for social supports and services with claims for food assistance surging by 99 percent and medical assistance by 42 percent during the past ten years.

In the decade following these dramatic and difficult structural economic conditions, Incourage transitioned from traditional “brick-and-mortar” philanthropy to strategic investment in the economic welfare of the south Wood County area.

Over the past three years, Incourage and its community partners have used National Fund support to launch a Funders Collaborative, workforce intermediary (Workforce Central), and three training partnerships: 1) the Manufacturing Partnership, 2) the Pathways Partnership, and 3) the IT Occupational Partnership. Formalized and ad hoc workgroups also assist and guide the work: the CEO Peer Council, IT Sector Board, HR Liaison Group, and Service Provider Network.

ABOUT WORKFORCE CENTRAL

In 2008, Incourage Community Foundation initiated Workforce Central as a strategic effort to address the growing workforce and economic challenges facing the community. Since 2002, Incourage had been transitioning from solely a grant-making community foundation to one that actively works to confront challenges facing the community. Key components of their strategy focused on developing adaptive leadership skills, shifting attitudes, and engaging leaders to work across boundaries.*

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions opportunity came at a natural point in Incourage’s growth. The National Fund has provided the region with a strong national partner and network to tackle a vital issue impacting the region: the need for an innovative multi-sector workforce system serving local businesses and workers within the broader context of community and economic development. Workforce Central serves a critical function in this effort, bringing workforce expertise and intermediary functions to south Wood County.

Note:* To execute this strategy, Incourage along with Heart of Wisconsin Business Alliance launched the Community Progress Initiative (2004-2008) with community leaders and stakeholders, including many of Workforce Central’s partners.

MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

The Manufacturing Partnership targets workers with some baseline skills and experience, but needing skill upgrades for future employability on a career pathway. At the same time, the partnership seeks to meet the future skill needs of manufacturing employers, as identified by an 11-member CEO Peer Council.

Manufacturing Leadership Program (MLP)

The Manufacturing Leadership Program arose from two executive observations: 1) a deficit of manufacturing employees with sufficient managerial skills to replace aging supervisors, and 2) inconsistent managerial methods among current supervisors. Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State) worked with CEO Peer Council members to develop the MLP.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

- Eight local employers sent incumbent workers through at least one MLP course.
- Almost 80 percent of participants were aged 30+, and 29 percent were female.
- 71 of 79 participants completed at least one course.
- High average GPA of 3.72, and 18 certifications earned.
- Career advancements for two students as a result of training (the majority already in supervisory roles).

KEY FINDINGS: WORKERS

- Exposure to mid-level workers from other companies and other manufacturing subsectors fueled student interest in the common, cross-sector challenges faced by supervisors.
- Participants indicated that Mid-State's training was more relevant and beneficial than in-house training opportunities. The time spent in training was immediately applicable on-the-job, and conferred portable, industry-recognized educational credits.

KEY FINDINGS: EMPLOYERS

- Partnership businesses expressed great satisfaction with the program. CEOs praised Mid-State's responsiveness to employer needs in designing the MLP to ensure relevant content, good instructor fit, and workplace relevance.
- Employers witnessed immediate results on the shop floor, e.g., supervisors consistently employ managerial principles and demonstrate better understanding of the business.
- CEOs find the MLP very cost effective, "a value" in comparison to the cost of in-house or customized training for a single company.

BEST PRACTICES

Effective collaboration yields dual-customer, multi-sector benefits: 1) Students gained shop-floor-ready supervisory skills along with portable industry-recognized credits, 2) employers gained skilled workers contributing to firm productivity, cost savings, and reduced turnover, and 3) training providers gained a more effective feedback loop with local employers.

Hands-on employer role has real results in the classroom: Advanced manufacturing executives had direct involvement in curriculum design and instructor screening. This heightened level of employer engagement facilitated on-the-job relevance and instructor effectiveness.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Focusing on incumbent workers is a gateway to robust employer engagement: Incumbent worker training is critical to moving current workers toward better wages and skills. The experience of successful collaboration led MLP employers to consider the needs of job seekers, a lesser-known population requiring a different type of recruitment, nurturing, and support.

Concern over program saturation and limited interest reinforces need for recruitment strategies: Employers and service providers expressed concern that reductions in the pipeline (among participating firms) of potential MLP students impedes sustainability. Also, decreased employee interest in supervisory positions further limits the pipeline. These concerns speak to the need for increased participation among additional local businesses.

Food Manufacturing Science Certificate (FMSC) Program

The FMSC Program aims to build a local workforce with the skills needed for the expanding food manufacturing sector, a growth industry as identified by the CEO Peer Council. The program is for job seekers with some baseline skills and experience, but needing training upgrades for future employability. The FMSC includes intensive case management and wrap-around support by the Labor Education and Training Council (LETC), contracted service provider of the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB), to address barriers common to returning adult learners.

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

- 71 percent of recruited candidates assessed with Workkeys.
- 51 percent of candidates assessed chosen as trainees, evenly split between male and female
- 18 of 20 trainees completed coursework.
- High average GPA of 3.71 with 16 trainees earning the FMSC.
- Eight employer-partners provided paid, 72-hour internships to 16 students.
- 12 of 16 trainees obtained jobs with average pay of \$14.64 per hour.

KEY FINDINGS: JOB SEEKERS

- Despite initial trepidation upon returning as an adult-learner, students experienced increased confidence with each incremental triumph in the fast-paced, intense program.
- Most participants indicated that they could not have completed the training without the assistance of the LETC case manager and wrap-around support services, including transportation assistance, tutoring, subsidized computer software, one-on-one help with resume-writing and job/interviewing skills, and mortgage assistance.

KEY FINDINGS: EMPLOYERS

- Employers expressed great satisfaction that collaboration may result in a permanent, formalized program in food

manufacturing at Mid-State, addressing the needs of the regional food sector.

- Exposed to a new recruitment pool of displaced workers, executives expressed satisfaction with the technical skills attained, and empathy for the economic, emotional, and psychological challenges faced by graduates of the program.

BEST PRACTICES

Model commitment from the public workforce system enables pilot program: A generous commitment of financial and human resources from the NCWWDB enabled the development of the industry-responsive FMSC along with enhanced job seeker supports.

Success rests on enhanced case management: The case management feature of FMSC including wrap-around support services provided by LETC proactively addressed barriers common to adult learners and proved *key* to student success. Students described the case manager as tireless, conscientious, immensely resourceful, empathetic, and approachable.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Sustaining cohort training and case management: Small cohorts and intensive case management are critical aspects of the training, but they may prove too resource-intensive for long-term sustainability given the required level of public investment. The partnership must problem solve on systems and policy levels to address resource constraints in a manner that maintains positive student outcomes.

Room to better manage student expectations: While an admirable number of participants secured employment, businesses expressed hesitancy about up-front commitments to hire FMSC graduates. Some participants also perceived a mismatch between the internship experience and the reality of permanent work. Increased employer engagement in participant screening and explanation of employer hiring models would help manage student expectations.

PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP

The goal of Pathways is to give low-income individuals (FoodShare participants) access to accelerated GED and/or occupational training through Mid-State combined with wrap-around support services provided by Wood County Human Services. In its first year, the project offered three accelerated training tracks, two focusing on Adult Basic Education (ABE) and one providing postsecondary credentials (Gerontology).

QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

- 75 participants across the three tracks, with 35 percent aged 22-29, and 45 percent aged 30+.
- 47 participants completed coursework with 29 completing certificates.
- 92 percent of participants were unemployed when training began.
- 43 percent of participants were hired with average wages of \$9.05 (Gerontology track) and \$11.23 (GED track).

JOB-SEEKERS: KEY FINDINGS

- Pathways focus group participants all experienced success with job placement: *“And you get a job out of this . . . I did. Actually, it’s in the profession!”*
- Pathways students offered broad praise for the extensive and ongoing case management provided on-site at Mid-State by Wood County Human Services.

EMPLOYERS: KEY FINDINGS

- Service providers found that the Pathways collaboration better connected employers with the real needs of workers. They saw employers gain an enhanced understanding of, and interest in, the barriers this population of workers face.

SERVICE PROVIDERS: KEY FINDINGS

- Transportation and childcare offerings were the most utilized wrap-around services for Pathways participants. Students found these benefits as critical to completion of the program.

- Service providers found that the Pathways collaboration better connected employers with the real needs of workers, while providing Mid-State and Wood County Human Services with numerous benefits from co-located training and case management.

BEST PRACTICES

Academic programming with on-site case management is a crucial success lever: The provision of enhanced case management located directly on-site at Mid-State not only successfully addressed barriers to completion for adult learners, but also promoted communication and understanding between Mid-State and Wood County Human Services staff.

The Pathways design tackles public benefits stigma: With educational training directly linked to a menu of social service supports, Pathways offers some protection from the regrettable stigma too often attached to public assistance benefits by a national culture strongly wedded to particular notions of “self-reliance.”

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Resource constraints at Mid-State threaten the sustainability of Pathways: Like many public institutions, Mid-State is no stranger to post-recessionary budget cuts. The college puts up 50 percent of the funding for Pathways and questions how it can sustain that funding match going forward.

Seize the opportunity to increase employer engagement in Pathways: Three health care employers provided helpful input on curriculum development, and offered job-shadowing experiences for students. This hands-on engagement is encouraging as Workforce Central works to recruit employer-partners to Pathways, and develop health care programming.

“We ensured there would be an industry-recognized credential to help the participant gain employment. Why go through the training if there’s nothing at the end to help them get a job?” – Service Provider

COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

The Workforce Central Funders Collaborative (the Collaborative) pools, allocates, and oversees investments to improve the workforce system for both businesses and workers. To achieve this goal, the Collaborative engaged local stakeholders in a strategy of systems change characterized by:

1. **Capacity building** through shared learning and collaborative relationships.
2. **Coordinated activity** such as pooled funding, dual-customer programs, and common metrics.
3. **Sustainability** achieved through stakeholder commitment, resources, policy advocacy, and jobs.

To facilitate and support systems change, the Collaborative also established a local intermediary. Workforce Central pursues workforce development within the broader context of improving south Wood County's economy. Workforce Central helps stakeholders adapt best practices, leverage multi-sector investments, and advocate for systems reform.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- **Stakeholders see need for multi-sector workforce investment:** Stakeholders acknowledge having learned about the use of philanthropic donations to leverage and attract public investment, and the critical role public resources play in improving workforce outcomes, particularly in a rural community.
- **Views of employer engagement vary by sector:** Public service providers appreciated employer participation in program design; however, they also expressed a need for greater recognition of the challenges faced by dislocated and disadvantaged workers. Private-sector CEOs also sought more opportunities for engagement, while noting that the public system continues to misunderstand the constraints facing local businesses.

COORDINATED ACTIVITY

- **Collaborative successfully attracts, leverages and invests funds:** To date, the Collaborative has pooled public, philanthropic and employer contributions of over \$2,154,877 to support employer engagement and worker training activities. The fund includes \$782,234 in leveraged public dollars.
- **Co-leadership structure gives voice to business and worker advocates:** The Collaborative and Manufacturing Partnership have co-leadership structures with both employers and service providers influencing program investments and design. CEOs signal training needs and industry forecasts, while service providers deliver training to meet the needs of business, and workers.

SUSTAINABILITY

- **Philanthropy necessary for continued employer engagement:** Employers viewed continued multi-sector engagement as most critical to sustainability. Several employer-partners indicated that their engagement would likely falter without philanthropy at the center of the effort – especially if driven solely by the public sector.
- **Workforce stakeholders have a role in economic development:** Two-thirds of Collaborative survey respondents expressed a desire to strengthen the link between local economic development, job creation, and workforce development. In April 2011, the Funders Collaborative allocated \$24,000 for FutureWorks to analyze the region's economic development assets and their link to Workforce Central. Manufacturing Partnership members have also begun to identify appropriate economic development roles and activities.

“I think the economic development piece is critical . . . our original purpose was to employ people, to train them so they can be employed. They keep reminding us that our job is not to create jobs, but that’s the other piece of the equation. For this thing to pan out we have to have the jobs on the other side.” – Local Donor

BEST PRACTICES

Foundational work supports future collaboration and improves program implementation: Incentive secured donor and employer support for workforce development and built confidence in a collaborative approach to regional revitalization. This foundational work subsequently supported Workforce Central's ability to align and develop the region's workforce development assets for multi-sector partnerships, and helped propel implementation of innovative training models.

View workforce development through an economic development lens: Workforce Central approached employers as a strategic problem-solver with public system expertise and resources. Business and worker needs drove investment, not funding prospects. For example, Workforce Central developed venues for employers to discuss general business issues, including but not limited to workforce development. This approach yielded value to employers, while providing a window into local business needs and practices.

Executive-level engagement moves collaborations forward: Workforce Central stakeholders valued the active engagement of decision-makers. The ability to speak for the organization and commit resources hastened the implementation process. Donors also viewed financial commitment by employers as critical to Workforce Central's future, sending a strong signal about the importance of workforce development in the community.

LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Identify objectives for systems change: Systems change is a pillar of Workforce Central's strategy. There is a need for shared understanding of what constitutes systems change. Opportunities for collaborative systems-based problem solving include:

1. **Re-integrating the long-term unemployed into the workforce.** Service providers note that the promise of these workers as a part of the local labor supply is often missed. Private-sector engagement is critical, as unemployment duration adversely impacts employment opportunity.
2. **Incentivizing industry-recognized training.** Workforce Central has experienced an unexpected challenge with its training programs: limited interest. This raises questions for the stakeholders: Does training, in fact, increase a person's likelihood of being employed? What is the private sector's role in creating incentives?

Increase multi-sector policy advocacy: Changes in workforce funding and policy at the state and federal levels make advocacy more critical. Public funding is being scaled back as workforce needs are increasing. South Wood County will compete against regions with greater economic need and higher unemployment. Workforce Central's stakeholders will need to advocate for its community, and its training models, as best practices worthy of continued support (funding and policy change).

Use philanthropic funding for systems reform: Unlike other stakeholders, Incentive had the budgetary flexibility to hire and devote expert personnel to the time-intensive task of pursuing systems change, e.g., stakeholder engagement, knowledge transfer, prototype development, convening, and advocacy. The collaboration should continue to use philanthropy to pilot programs that "go beyond interventions on behalf of individuals . . . to change the system in key ways."

Leverage investment in FutureWorks' Economic Development Roadmap: Workforce Central brings experience viewing workforce development through an economic development lens to drive collaborative investments benefiting businesses, workers, and the broader community. Its success engaging employers is also a key asset: Local CEOs can be persuasive messengers for the community goal of an economy built on family-sustaining jobs.

Incourage Community Foundation's Workforce Central initiative commissioned this independent, local evaluation of its workforce development efforts. This evaluation uses quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess progress towards achieving Workforce Central's goals and "Ultimate Outcome":

"Everyone in south Wood County who wants to work has ample opportunities to prepare for and secure a family-sustaining job and advance in a career over time. Current and prospective workers conveniently access a comprehensive, seamless array of education, training, and support services, provided by a strong partnership of employers, educators, and service providers that takes shared responsibility for a healthy workforce, economy, and job market."

— Adopted February 2010

Incourage Community Foundation (Incourage) and its funding partners have pursued this long-term objective in response to the growing economic needs of the historically single-industry, rural community. Workforce Central serves a critical function in this effort, bringing workforce expertise and intermediary functions to south Wood County.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The south Wood County area¹ covers 823 square miles in rural, central Wisconsin. The area is home to 43,083 people.² South Wood County's economy historically has been driven by the paper industry; whereas northern Wood County's economy is anchored by a thriving health care sector. These economic conditions have created higher unemployment and poverty rates for the southern part of the county. The past decade has witnessed a shift towards other industries. A combination of factors has propelled this change: globalization of the paper industry, increased demand for locally sourced manufactured food products, and community-based efforts to diversify the industrial base.

The move to a more diverse economy has resulted in significant, immediate hardship for many people living in the community. A series of layoffs hit the community as international firms purchased and restructured local paper mills between 2000 and 2008. Through this period of industry upheaval, *"greater south Wood County lost about 39 percent of existing jobs."*³ The Great Recession exacerbated the job loss, resulting in Wood County unemployment rates over 10 percent⁴ at the height of the economic decline.⁵

1 Incourage Community Foundation serves a self-designated cultural and economic region that includes Biron, Cranmoor, Grand Rapids, Nekoosa, Pittsville, Port Edwards, Rome, Rudolph, Saratoga, Seneca, Sigel, Vesper, and Wisconsin Rapids. See also www.incouragecf.org

2 Demographic Services Center, 2011. "Time Series of the Final Population Estimates and Census Counts for Wisconsin Minor Civil Divisions." Wisconsin Department of Administration. Available at: www.doa.state.wi.us/subcategory.asp?linksubcatid=96&locid=9

3 Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

4 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012. *Local Area Unemployment Statistics Database*. One-Screen Data Search. Series ID LAUPA55120003. Available at: www.bls.gov/lau/#tables

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports unemployment rates at the county level. Consequently rates provided in this report reflect Wood County's unemployment, rather than the smaller sub-county region of south Wood County.

5 *Id.*

Wood County experienced its highest unemployment rates during the first quarter of 2010: 10.8 percent in January, 10.8 percent in February, and 10.7 percent in March.

ABOUT WORKFORCE CENTRAL

In 2008, Incourage Community Foundation initiated Workforce Central as a strategic effort to address the growing workforce and economic challenges facing the community. Since 2002, Incourage had been transitioning from solely a grant-making community foundation to one that actively works to confront challenges facing the community. Key components of their strategy focused on developing adaptive leadership skills, shifting attitudes, and engaging leaders to work across boundaries.*

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions opportunity came at a natural point in Incourage's growth. The National Fund has provided the region with a strong national partner and network to tackle a vital issue impacting the region: the need for an innovative multi-sector workforce system serving local businesses and workers within the broader context of community and economic development. Workforce Central serves a critical function in this effort, bringing workforce expertise and intermediary functions to south Wood County.

Note:* To execute this strategy, Incourage along with Heart of Wisconsin Business Alliance launched the Community Progress Initiative (2004-2008) with community leaders and stakeholders, including many of Workforce Central's partners.

With unemployment rates falling faster than other parts of the country, the region appears to have entered recovery. In 2011, unemployment fell from a high of 9.1 percent in February to 6.4 percent in November.⁶ This decrease may, in fact, reflect other economic challenges facing the region. Paper industry layoffs, combined with recessionary job losses, have likely dissuaded some residents from participating in the labor force. Unemployment rates only capture those individuals who are without work *and are actively looking for it*.

The decreased unemployment rate may also reveal a common rural trend: population decreases underlie a low unemployment rate. With fewer local job opportunities, dislocated workers and young residents leave the area. South Wood County's population statistics support this trend. Between 2000 and 2010, the region lost 1.9 percent of its population compared to a 6.0 percent growth rate for Wisconsin.⁷ Over the past forty years, the region has grown at slightly more than half the state rate (18 percent growth from 1970 to 2010 compared to state population growth of 29 percent).⁸ Wood County is also one of the oldest counties in the state, exacerbating the impact of the national trend of an aging workforce.

In 2002, In courage Community Foundation conducted a series of public focus groups in 2008 to discern the community's most immediate needs for philanthropic investment. Not surprisingly, the community spoke of one overarching local need: *"the common theme was 'we need jobs' because of the transition that was happening in the community."*⁹

Conversations with local business leaders in 2008 revealed a significant obstacle to improving local economic conditions: the area's traditional, mill-trained workforce lacked the specialized skills needed for local jobs in stable and emerging industries. Local businesses

*"were voicing, 'we're opening a plant and we're looking for people, and we've got unemployed people in the community but they are not skilled, and don't have the tools we need. We're sitting here with nobody to fill these jobs and we're going outside the community to hire.'"*¹⁰

In short, the transition from one industry significantly increased the number of low-skilled, low-income individuals found among newly dislocated, underemployed, and incumbent workers.

Local Business Conditions

The residents of Central Wisconsin have traditionally relied upon manufacturing for secure, family-sustaining jobs. In the south Wood County area, middle class lifestyles awaited high school graduates who moved from the classroom to the paper mill or allied companies. Paper served as the area's industrial base, principal employer, and source of community leadership. As ownership transferred from local families to multinationals, the primacy and economic promise of the paper company began to wane. The community's involuntary transition to a more diversified economy has highlighted both natural and imported assets.

The local food manufacturing industry has experienced a number of expansions in recent years, as national demand for processed food products increased. Cranberries, dairy, and potatoes are both sourced and processed locally, enabling the community to capture value from its agricultural assets. To remain competitive, many local food processors have embraced advanced manufacturing techniques including computer-controlled and automated technologies.

As a rural community, south Wood County struggles with attracting technology professionals. Advanced manufacturing employers experience difficulties hiring engineers. The community also has expressed a general need for information technology (IT) professionals. The nonprofit, public and private sectors all have difficulty meeting their IT needs locally. At the same time, the area

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Demographic Services Center, 2011. "Time Series of the Final Population Estimates and Census Counts for Wisconsin Minor Civil Divisions." Wisconsin Department of Administration. Available at: www.doa.state.wi.us/subcategory.asp?linksubcatid=96&locid=9.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹⁰ *Id.*

has experienced an influx of firms dependent upon information technology. Educational software development, financial services, insurance, and health care information management are among the large employers hiring for IT occupations. In fact, the region has seen increased H1-B visa applications for IT occupational categories, second only to health care applications.¹¹

These two emerging industries share several economic challenges. Both industries require highly skilled, technically adept workers. Yet, with local degree attainment¹² of 29 percent,¹³ many workers lack computer, applied math, and technical reading/writing skills. (This compares to a national degree attainment rate of 35 percent.¹⁴) In 2010, local technical college and university information technology programs graduated just under 100 students.¹⁵

As “the growth of the paper industry became less, (the community) started to get more structural poverty in younger individuals who weren’t able to move on to college or move into employment.”¹⁶ Consequently, the community has developed “a structural group of people who are unemployable, a fairly tailored set of skills made for making fine paper but not really very much else.”¹⁷ Employers also cite limited managerial skills among incumbent employees who otherwise might replace supervisors projected to retire within ten years.

Although less immediate than the paper industry, food manufacturing and information technology face globalization pressures. Both industries are challenged to maintain profit margins through product and business process innovation. As one local business leader cautioned,

“If you’re going to survive in 2011, in global manufacturing, (then) R&D, innovation and training are a must. Again, (it’s) the age-old problem of the past, of competing with the guy down the street. We have to figure out how to move a box from here to there, quicker and better and faster so we don’t want to spend any money training. But, with advancing manufacturing and the need to innovate every day . . . the whole story about the Zebra and the lion, you got to get up and run really fast, and the only way to do that is training and research.”¹⁸

Social Supports and Services

The job of aligning labor quality to business demand often falls to the public and nonprofit sectors. The North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) is responsible for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) employment and training programs in nine counties, including Wood County. The AFL-CIO’s Labor Education and Training Center (LETC) is the contracted provider for the NCWWDB’s dislocated worker programs, including one-stop job center operations and case management in south Wood County. In addition to training support through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), Wood County Department of Human Services provides support services for low-income residents. Several community-based organizations provide similar wrap-around services to south Wood County residents, including North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP) and Christian Life Fellowship.

¹¹ DWD Office of Economic Advisors, Workforce Development Area #6, June 2011.

¹² For purposes of this report, “postsecondary education” refers to the attainment of an associate, bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degree. “Local” refers to the south Wood County area.

¹³ Educational Attainment – Wood County, Wisconsin. Selected Sub-Counties of Wood County. 2010 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau. 5-Year Estimates. S1501.

¹⁴ Educational Attainment – United States, 2010. American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau. 5-Year Estimates. S1501. Available at: factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?_afpt=table

¹⁵ Mid-State Technical College graduated 32 students from its IT Network Specialist and IT Programmer Analyst programs. University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point graduated 62 students from three programs: Information Assurance and Networking, Application Development, and Web and Digital Media Development.

¹⁶ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹⁷ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹⁸ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State) is a key training provider in the area that helps dislocated workers retool, incumbent workers up-skill, and businesses develop their workforces. Public support for Mid-State's programs includes WIA training accounts, Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grants, SNAP E&T funding, and federal student aid such as Pell Grants.

As local job opportunities decreased, the need for social services and training assistance surged. Over the past ten years, claims for food assistance increased by 99 percent and medical assistance increased by 42 percent.¹⁹ In early 2011, south Wood County also accounted for 89 percent of emergency assistance claims.²⁰

Service providers described the increased demand for services as follows:

"It's also had a significant impact on the amount of FoodShare recipients and BadgerCare recipients. I mean people losing jobs, they need health insurance, they need some level of coverage, they need help to put food on the table."²¹

– Social Services Provider

"We are seeing higher enrollment (at) the technical and industrial programs and, well, one thing it's really done for me is it's really stressed my resources. The people resources, yes, but also my equipment and facilities and I'm really starting to feel it. The second way it's affected us is that it's getting more and more difficult for me to either hang onto existing opportunities or build new opportunities for (training) people if I can't show immediate results."²²

– Tech College Rep

"For our agency, what we're seeing is, we've always worked with a low-income base . . . but we're seeing that extend itself out to more kind of nontraditional types of clients. People that always found a way to make it, now they can't."²³

– Case Manager

"I would say it's very challenging to meet the needs. And, I would think as the size of the community gets smaller it gets more difficult to meet those needs. On all fronts from your availability of resources, to the availability of potential students, to the availability of good jobs, all of those things. (W)e're not alone in that, you can go to any rural area."²⁴

– Public Workforce System Rep

COLLABORATION AND PHILANTHROPY

In the decade following these dramatic and difficult structural economic conditions, Incentive transitioned from traditional "brick-and-mortar" philanthropy to strategic investment in the economic welfare of the south Wood County area. The foundation began its efforts in workforce by researching best practice and innovation. This resulted in advocacy at the local and national level by Incentive CEO Kelly Ryan Lucas, for resources to rural communities dedicated to closing the skill-gap through sector-based, employer-driven workforce partnerships. Successfully matching worker skills to employer needs would not only increase opportunity for the area's low-skilled workers, but would also improve south Wood County's economic competitiveness, reinvigorate its industries, and ignite a sense of hope and community esteem.

¹⁹ Statistics compiled by Wood County Human Services.

²⁰ Statistics compiled by Wood County Human Services. Low-income individuals with at least one child are eligible for Emergency Assistance to prevent homelessness. Benefits include rent, mortgage, and utility payment assistance. For more information, go to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families at www.dcfwi.gov.

²¹ Service Provider Focus Group

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

In 2008, Incourage and its stakeholder partners²⁵ submitted a proposal to the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (the National Fund). The “Partners for Workforce Innovation” became one of the first rural sites using the National Fund’s partnership model. The National Fund model relies upon:

“(r)egional funding collaboratives dedicated to investing in workforce partnerships that effectively assist low income individuals obtain and advance in careers paying family-sustaining wages and benefits, while at the same time ensuring that employers have the high quality human resources that will enable them to succeed in this dynamic and competitive economy.”²⁶

The National Fund uses philanthropy’s expertise in stakeholder engagement and fund management to help drive sector-based workforce partnerships. Over the past three years, Incourage has used National Fund support to establish a Funders Collaborative, a workforce intermediary (Workforce Central), and three attendant training partnerships: 1) the Manufacturing Partnership, 2) the Pathways Partnership, and 3) the IT Occupational Partnership.

The Funders Collaborative

In December 2008, Incourage and other local donors formed the Workforce Central Funders Collaborative (the Funders Collaborative). Five employers from the Manufacturing Partnership CEO Peer Council and the executive of the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board also participate in the collaborative. This multi-sector group of investors advocates for workforce development and serves as a strategic decision-making body:

“Funders Collaborative members are investors and ambassadors for workforce development in greater south Wood County. They educate the public, employers and other donors on the role of workforce investment in revitalizing the community. The group exercises fiscal and decision-making authority over the distribution of (pooled) funds through Workforce Central.”²⁷

– Local Donor

WORKFORCE CENTRAL FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE

Incourage Community Foundation

ERCO Worldwide

Corenso North America

Mariani Packing Company, Inc.
(formally Urban Processing LLC)

NewPage Corporation

North Central Wisconsin Workforce
Development Board

Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.

Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.
Wisconsin Rapids Plant

R.C. Charitable Foundation

Riverview Health Care Foundation

Solarus

WoodTrust/Bell Family Charitable Foundation

Alexander Charitable Foundation

Paper City Savings Charitable Foundation

Gerard and Davis Veneman Fund

Daniel and Cheryl Urban Family

Note: Twelve donor advised fundholders are also collectively represented on the Funders Collaborative.

²⁵ Incourage recruited the Core Partners group, a precursor to the Funders Collaborative and Service Provider Network, to submit the first rural National Fund for Workforce Solutions grant proposal. The Core Partners included Incourage Community Foundation, North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board, Mid-State Technical College, and Heart of Wisconsin Business Alliance.

²⁶ The National Fund for Workforce Solutions, 2011. *Our Strategy*. Available at: nfwfsolutions.org/our-strategy

²⁷ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

The Funders Collaborative meets bi-monthly with the CEO of Incourage serving as chair.

The Funders Collaborative brings together direct financial support from local and national sources, as well as aligned state and federal funding. To date, 25 local philanthropies have invested in Workforce Central with Incourage providing both financial and in-kind administrative support. Leveraged against these philanthropic donations are training dollars from the public sector totaling \$782,234 and employer cash contributions of \$22,443.²⁸ As a result of the Collaborative's success pooling workforce development funds, the effort received funding from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (\$100,000/year for two years) and the White House-sponsored Social Innovation Fund (\$400,000 over two years). Hence, the Workforce Central Funders Collaborative manages a consolidated fund of over \$2,154,877, to date.

In its first three years, the Funders Collaborative used its financial resources to support critical workforce investments including: 1) executive-level employer engagement on specific skill needs and corresponding job opportunities, 2) assessment of educational and work readiness gaps within the local workforce, and 3) long-term, collaborative relationships between employers, service providers, and philanthropy. This foundational work led to a strategic community-driven investment plan characterized by Workforce Central's "Ultimate Outcome" and attendant goals.²⁹

Community-Driven Investment

In February 2010, the Workforce Central Funders Collaborative adopted a statement created by an advisory group of service providers:

"Everyone in south Wood County who wants to work has ample opportunities to prepare for and secure a family-sustaining job and advance in a career over time. Current and prospective workers conveniently access a comprehensive, seamless array of education, training, and support services, provided by a strong partnership of employers, educators, and service providers that takes shared responsibility for a healthy workforce, economy, and job market."

This "Ultimate Outcome" guides the Funders Collaborative's investments in, and operation of, training partnerships.

An attendant set of local goals reflects Workforce Central's dual-customer approach:

- Employers are able to hire and retain local skilled workers at competitive wages.
- All workers have the skills they need to successfully participate in a vibrant, local labor market.
- Articulated career pathways exist in industries vital to the south Wood County region.
- Policies support rural workforce partnerships, employers, and workers.

In pursuing these objectives, the Funders Collaborative was deliberate and strategic in its choice of investments. The Collaborative focused on "training workers for jobs that exist."

"Workers" are people who are able to work, whether they have a job or not – job seekers (including the long-term unemployed), dislocated workers, high school students, underemployed workers, and incumbent workers (in need of upgraded skills for career or income advancement). Given the skill gaps and demographic attributes of south Wood County's workforce, the Funders Collaborative prioritized investments that would help re-skill workers with a history of employment.

²⁸ Employer-partners also pay training expenses (tuition and wages) for incumbent employees and wages covering paid internships (72 hours) for job seekers.

²⁹ John Molinaro of the Aspen Institute designed and facilitated the process leading to the creation of the "Ultimate Outcome" and supporting goals. An advisory group of service providers developed the language later adopted by the Funders Collaborative.

By targeting “jobs that exist,” the Funders Collaborative has limited both the sectors and the training programs that qualify for investment. Funded training partnerships must design their programs to deliver job-ready participants in time for projected job openings. The Collaborative’s employer-partners identified four industries with opportunities for expansion or stable job creation: advanced manufacturing, food processing, information technology, and health care. As further detailed below, employer engagement has led the Collaborative to direct its first investments towards advanced manufacturing, food processing, and bridge programs to health care and information technology occupations.

Workforce Central

Unlike urban National Fund recipients, south Wood County lacked local organizations with the experience and resources to immediately undertake an active workforce facilitation role. Consequently, the development of effective, local intermediaries became a key objective of the community’s National Fund initiative.

Workforce Central was established to serve both the roles of workforce intermediary and capacity builder. As a trusted facilitator, Incourage has assumed responsibility for housing Workforce Central within the organization, overseeing administrative operations, and integrating staff into its organizational structure. Workforce Central’s Project Director, Jennifer Riggenschach, brings extensive experience working with industry partnerships, specialized knowledge of workforce development systems, and the ability to align public and private dollars. Overall, Incourage staff understand the world of philanthropy, donor relations, and community culture. Most critically, Workforce Central has benefited from the decade of investments Incourage has made to build community capacity, good will, and stakeholder connections.

Workforce Central pursues workforce development within the broader context of improving the economy of south Wood County. Specific strategies employed by Workforce Central include:

1. Convening community stakeholders for shared learning and comprehensive planning.
2. Funding worker training that will have a direct and sustainable impact on business.
3. Building the capacity of organizations to enhance the local network of services available to workers and job seekers.
4. Advocating for public policies that support workers and employers.³⁰

Girding this strategy is a commitment to the “dual customer.” The dual customer approach seeks to improve outcomes for: 1) individuals, in particular low-skilled and low-income workers in need of family-sustaining jobs with career advancement potential, and 2) employers in need of a skilled workforce for survival and growth. To a technical college representative, dual-customer service means,

“[O]ur willingness to allow [employers] to inform a selection of faculty or maybe the curriculum. So on one hand certainly participants in training . . . they’re our customers . . . because that’s who we’re delivering the training . . . to meet the needs of those employers.”³¹

– Tech College Rep

³⁰ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

³¹ Service Provider Focus Group

From the level of the Funders Collaborative, the dual customer approach is viewed as critical to an effective investment strategy:

“The customer is the employer and the worker. [At another NFWS site], there was a group in the back really angry. ‘We have trained the workers! Why aren’t you hiring them?’ And it was like, ‘Yeah, why aren’t you?’ Then you realize that you can train as much as you want but if it’s not what [employers] need, it’s down the tubes.”³²

– Local Donor

To date, Workforce Central has promoted the development of effective partnerships by sharing best practices, actively engaging the public and private sectors, and advocating for systems reform.

WORKFORCE CENTRAL: A PHILANTHROPIC WORKFORCE INTERMEDIARY

Workforce Central epitomizes current thinking on effective workforce intermediaries. As detailed in Giloth’s *Workforce Intermediaries for the Twenty-First Century*,

*“The intermediary approach is **dual customer**, brokering partners, and integrating resources for the purposes of meeting employer and worker needs. The intermediary organization has to be **entrepreneurial**, results oriented, and an **adaptive** learner. Both components are essential for what we are calling workforce intermediaries.”³³*
(Emphasis added.)

In its role as advisor to the Funders Collaborative, Workforce Central helps leverage public, private, and philanthropic funding to embed a dual customer approach into workforce training partnerships and programs. The capacity to meet the needs of the dual customer – employer and worker – is a key criterion for Funders Collaborative investment. Any funded program must actively engage employers in identifying skill gaps, guiding program relevancy, and providing on-the-job experience. Worker engagement is both direct and indirect, with programs routinely soliciting training participant feedback, and social service representatives advocating on behalf of workers. Workforce Central’s staff facilitates communication between public and private stakeholders by translating stakeholder needs and perspectives from a neutral position.

Rallying community leaders around workforce development investments exemplifies the informed, calculated risk-taking of an entrepreneurial organization. Workforce Central embodies entrepreneurial spirit, adapting and innovating best practices to serve the unique characteristics of a rural community.

“I’m heartened by the comments I hear (from Workforce Central). Because it’s a kind of thinking that the public system doesn’t always have. It’s that entrepreneurial and risk-taking thinking that I really think is important to drive this project.”³⁴

– Public Workforce System Rep

While fully satisfying the accepted definition of intermediary, Workforce Central represents a unique convening model. Philanthropy is well represented as a convener of workforce funders; however, philanthropy rarely serves as the key intermediary brokering partnerships, facilitating program development, and managing training projects.

³² Funders Collaborative Focus Group

³³ Giloth, Robert P., 2003. *Workforce Intermediaries for the Twenty-First Century*.

³⁴ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

Workforce Central Training Partnerships

In 2009 Workforce Central sponsored a site visit to the West Central Initiative, a community foundation serving rural West Central Minnesota.³⁵ Employers credited this experience with showing community leaders how things could be better:

"There were probably four or . . . six companies to take a look, to go along on this trip to Minnesota, to see how this collaborative was working. And the interest for us was we clearly recognized that our industry was changing tremendously and it was the ability to plug into training as well as the collaboration with local businesses to see what we could do to support each other and remain competitive."³⁶

"I don't know if four or five years ago, I (would) have been quite as inclined. I would have said, "Things are going great here. The paper mill is doing fine." All of a sudden down we went. Now manufacturing is expanding all over the place in the area. So I think we're right at the front of a bright future in the area. But [Minnesota's] what hooked me. They had some things going on over there."³⁷

Propelled by the interest and hope inspired by the West Central Minnesota visit, the Funders Collaborative established the Worker Training Fund and the Workforce Partnership Training Fund³⁸ in 2009. Through an outcome-based funding process, the Collaborative allocated \$63,616 from the Worker Training Fund to support advanced manufacturing partnership training and \$325,000 to support employer engagement.³⁹ The Collaborative also awarded a \$30,000 match grant to the Pathways Partnership for training low-skill or low-wage (disadvantaged) workers. In 2011, the Collaborative funded the IT Occupational Partnership with \$33,463.

The Collaborative's public sector members aligned \$782,234 to support training through the partnerships. The North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) aligned \$425,952 in WIA funding for advanced manufacturing training. Pathways received \$284,268 in public support. To move the nascent IT Occupational Partnership forward, the NCWWDB contributed \$3,000.

MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP

Launched in fall 2009, the Manufacturing Partnership is the most mature of the three partnerships. The partnership targets workers with some baseline skills and experience, but who need upgrades for future employability on a career pathway. At the same time, the partnership seeks to meet the skill needs of manufacturing employers, as identified by the 11-member CEO Peer Council.

MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP CEO PEER COUNCIL

Corenso North America

Energy Composites Corporation

ERCO Worldwide

Fey Printing

Foremost Foods

Golden County Foods

Kickapoo Valley Cheese Corporation

Mariani Packing Company, Inc.

McCain Foods

NewPage Corporation

Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc.

³⁵ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

³⁶ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

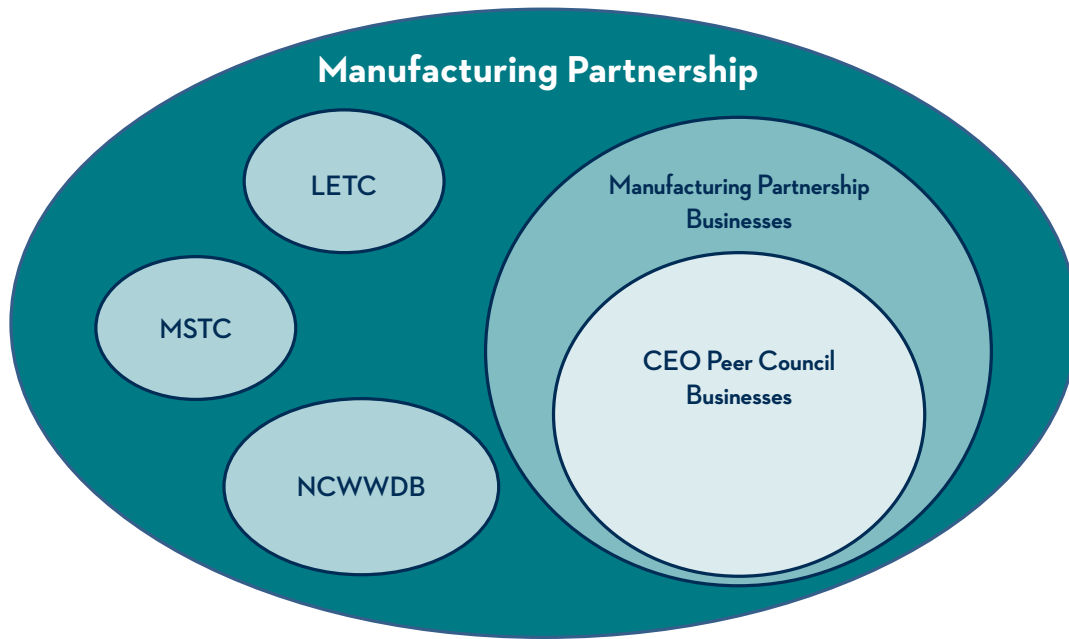
³⁷ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

³⁸ Due to the Social Innovation Fund award, the Funders Collaborative has not yet utilized the Workforce Partnership Training Fund. Workforce Central will consider appropriate funding requests as they arise.

³⁹ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

The Funders Collaborative initially chose advanced manufacturing as its sector focus because members had established employer relationships and the sector presented existing wage and benefit opportunities. Workforce Central plans to use successful advanced manufacturing prototypes to build visibility and credibility among other sectors, including information technology and health care.

WORKFORCE CENTRAL MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP



Facilitated by Workforce Central, the partnership includes Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State), the Labor Employment and Training Council (LETC), and the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB).⁴⁰ Mid-State provides industry-recognized training to re-skill dislocated and incumbent workers. Under contract with the NCWWDB, LETC delivers wrap-around support services to dislocated workers. Guided by the CEO Peer Council, the partnership's initial academic offerings have included: 1) certificate programs in Food Manufacturing Science, and 2) certificate programs in Supervisory Management. Both certificate programs ladder into associate degrees.

Beyond its strategic funding role on the Funders Collaborative, Incourage also commits the extensive human resources and logistical support necessary to develop and cultivate the Manufacturing Partnership. Staff members advise the Funders Collaborative on pooling stakeholder investments to support the partnership's innovative training services. For example, the partnership has reserved flexible philanthropic dollars for participant supports and supplies, while applying public dollars to training costs. Staff members also help communicate stakeholder needs and perspectives, translating between employers, service providers, and participants.

PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP

As claims for public food assistance (FoodShare) skyrocketed, Wood County Human Services partnered with Mid-State Technical College to train low-skilled, low-income individuals for jobs with career potential. Reflective of Workforce Central's goals of increasing economic opportunity and access, the Funders Collaborative awarded the partnership \$30,000.

The goal of the Pathways Partnership is to give low-income individuals (FoodShare Wisconsin participants) access to accelerated GED and/or occupational training combined with wrap-around support services. These types of enhanced training models have proven successful at helping workers with multiple barriers achieve educational goals, gain steady employment, and increase their earnings.

⁴⁰ The Workforce Development Board funds the training through WIA dislocated worker funds (\$111,790 WIA administrative funds and \$45,810 WIA Dislocated Worker contracted services) and a Wisconsin Industry Partnership Training Grant (\$198,165 WIA discretionary).

Mid-State Technical College tailored existing Adult Basic Education (ABE) and post-secondary programs for the FoodShare population, including new delivery models and revised curricula. In its first year, the project offered three accelerated training tracks:

Academic Track One: Accelerated General Equivalency Diploma (GED) with Career Assessment, Job Seeking, Job Retention, and Computer Literacy.

Academic Track Two: Pre-College Preparation with Career Assessment and Computer Literacy.

Academic Track Three: Gerontology/Memory Caregiver Certificate with Job Seeking Skills and Job Retention Workshop.

Seamless integration of academic training and support services was a key goal of the partnership. Wood County Human Services delivered on-site, enhanced case management at Mid-State Technical College. In addition to weekly monitoring of student performance, case managers offered transportation vouchers and childcare assistance.

IT OCCUPATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

A \$30,000 planning grant awarded by the Funders Collaborative in February 2011 led to the IT Occupational Partnership. The partnership includes input from twelve employers. Facilitated by Mid-State Technical College and University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (UWSP), the partnership also benefits from the contribution of consultants from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Center for Civic Media.⁴¹ The partnership seeks to define the information technology skill gap for a rural region and build local workforce capacity to meet the IT needs of local industries. Mid-State and UWSP have fashioned the IT Occupational Partnership after another National Fund model, the Central Iowa Works sector board.⁴² The partners also plan to incorporate lessons learned from Workforce Central’s Manufacturing Partnership, such as “training workers for jobs that exist.”

Mid-State and UWSP conducted a nine-month study of local IT job trends, skill gaps, educational requirements, and training opportunities. The researchers presented their findings at a November 2011 kick-off meeting. Representatives from seven businesses, NCWWDB, and the K-12 system provided extensive feedback. In 2012, partnership activities will begin in earnest with members establishing a charter and identifying shared business goals.

IT OCCUPATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The following employers participated in the launch of the IT Occupational Partnership in 2011:

Incourage Community Foundation

Marshfield Clinic

Mid-State Technical College

North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board

Noel Group

Renaissance Learning

Riverview Medical Center

Sentry Insurance

Skyward

Solarus

Travel Guard

University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point

Wisconsin Rapids School District

Wood Trust Bank

Zaxx Technologies

⁴¹ See also civic.mit.edu.

⁴² The Central Iowa Works Funding Collaborative is a National Fund recipient, using a partnership model known as the sector board. Central Iowa Works has six sector boards: Information Technology, Financial Services, Construction, Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, and Energy. Each sector board involves the participation of employers, educators, workforce agencies, labor, community-based organizations and other stakeholders. The six boards are charged with the development of career pathway “maps” or “ladders,” the identification of untapped labor supply, the improved alignment of training programs with employer needs, and the creation of a Career Readiness Certificate to facilitate hiring. See also www.centraliowaworks.org.

Workgroups

The Workforce Central training partnerships rely upon both formalized and ad hoc workgroups to inform partnership activities. Employer engagement occurs through a CEO Peer Council, HR Liaison Group, and IT Sector Board. Public and nonprofit agencies participate in the Service Provider Network. These workgroups provide stakeholder cohorts with a venue for information exchange and decision-making. An added advantage, impacting strategic investment, is the dual role many stakeholders play as members of the Funders Collaborative. Representatives of the CEO Peer Council, IT Sector Board, and Service Provider Network also sit on the Funders Collaborative.

CEO PEER COUNCIL

Executives from local businesses drive the substantive work of the Manufacturing Partnership. These employer-partners identify skill gaps, guide curriculum development, interview and approve instructors, and contribute financial and staff resources. Most critical to program effectiveness, the CEO Peer Council provides routine, constructive feedback through monthly peer-to-peer meetings and direct interaction with Workforce Central's Peer Council Facilitators.⁴³ The Peer Council Facilitators, John Bergin and Rick Merdan, are credited for their industry expertise, and for *“being good communicators to the Peer Council and back to the (service providers), so they fully understand what the needs are, and work with them to meet those needs.”*⁴⁴

During the formative phase of the Manufacturing Partnership, employers provided industry forecasts and identified training needs. The need for employer input increased when the partnership began to develop training programs. Employers advised service providers on curriculum content, course delivery, and instructor selection. Employers also assessed worker preparedness after program completion, noting any technical or soft skill deficiencies. For the Manufacturing Leadership Program, employers paid tuition and supply costs, as well as incumbent worker wages. Five of the council businesses provided paid 72-hour internships for Food Manufacturing Science participants. With several trainings completed, council members have begun in a strategic planning process to define goals and activities for the next level of engagement.

The CEO Peer Council has established a charter within which they operate, and has committed to an environment of mutual respect and confidentiality among its members. Council members meet once a month.

HR LIAISON GROUP

Members of the CEO Peer Council contributed human resources staff to coordinate incumbent worker participation in the Manufacturing Leadership Program and the intern experience for Food Manufacturing Science students. The HR Liaison Group meets on an ad-hoc basis to share information and brainstorm logistical issues. HR Liaisons also provide feedback on employer skill needs and intern performance.

SERVICE PROVIDER NETWORK

The Workforce Central Service Provider Network (SPN) formed in 2009, uniting nonprofit, educational, government, economic development, and faith-based organizations to ensure that workers are prepared for the types of jobs available in local industries. Through the Network, agency leaders formulated a strategic plan for remediating workforce skill gaps using industry-recognized training and wrap-around services. The Funders Collaborative adopted SPN's recommendations and “Ultimate Outcome” in 2010.

The local workforce development board, technical college, and human services agencies brought considerable funding to the table: Mid-State Technical College leveraged a Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grant to support the Manufacturing Leadership Program, the NCWWDB aligned WIA training dollars for both the Manufacturing Leadership and Food Manufacturing programs, and Mid-State Technical College and Wood County Human Services leveraged Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

⁴³ The Peer Council Facilitator is employed by Incentive to serve as liaison between employers and service providers.

⁴⁴ Service Provider Network Focus Group

Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) matching funds to support Pathways. Notably, the service providers have assumed the voice of the worker, educating other stakeholders on the barriers, needs, and positive attributes of job seekers, in particular the long-term unemployed. Similar to CEO Peer Council members, service provider executives influenced training program design and implementation.

As the partnerships shifted from program design to implementation, the composition of the Service Provider Network (SPN) changed. Currently, thirty (30) mid-level managers and case management providers use the network to share information, coordinate resources, and troubleshoot solutions. The SPN meets monthly. An ad-hoc group of providers meet to coordinate logistics and services for the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program. This Food Manufacturing Subgroup meets periodically, and includes related Mid-State academic departments and LETC. The Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO) Subgroup brings together members of the Food Manufacturing Subgroup, the Manufacturing Leadership Subgroup and Pathways providers to develop a common platform for tracking Workforce Central outcomes. In 2012, the ETO Subgroup agreed upon a common enrollment form.

IT SECTOR BOARD

Employer-members of the IT Occupational Partnership have formed a sector board. Workforce Central will guide the IT Sector Board through its formative stages, sharing best practices and lessons learned from the CEO Peer Council and the Central Iowa Works sector boards. Three private-sector members (Solarus, Riverview Health Care Foundation, and WoodTrust Bank) and NCWWDB from the Funders Collaborative also participate on the IT Sector Board.

METHODOLOGY

As a grantee of the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (National Fund) and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), Workforce Central is required to participate in annual local and national evaluations of its progress. The National Fund evaluation relies upon cumulative data reporting and qualitative accounts to assess Workforce Central's progress toward its investment goals.⁴⁵ The SIF award created additional evaluation responsibilities for Workforce Central. The SIF evaluation will use participant-level data to assess the impact of the NFWS partnership model.⁴⁶ This "net impact" study compares participant outcomes to a control group. In addition to data generated by the partnerships, the SIF evaluators will need Workforce Central's assistance accessing state-level administrative data, such as Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records.

In 2010, Workforce Central hired COWS (the Center on Wisconsin Strategy) to serve as its local evaluator. The local evaluation will assess progress made by Workforce Central's Funders Collaborative and its Manufacturing, Pathways, and IT Occupational Partnerships. COWS has over 20 years of experience with industry partnership models, beginning with contributions to the establishment of Milwaukee's Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP). COWS has also conducted analysis of UI wage records, the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) student progress data, the state employment and employment projection data, and Wisconsin samples of national data regarding wages and work. In 2011, COWS developed an evaluation plan for Wisconsin's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs, including recommendations for using existing administrative data to demonstrate WIA progress.

This experience has provided COWS with a broad knowledge and relationship base to help inform the local evaluation, coordinate with the national evaluation teams, and improve Workforce Central's evaluation capacity. In 2011, COWS: a) facilitated discussion of data collection methods and tools for an efforts-to-outcomes (ETO) client tracking system, b) conducted a series of focus groups and interviews of Workforce Central stakeholders, and c) advised Workforce Central on meeting the data collection requirements for the Social Innovation Fund.

⁴⁵ Workforce Learning Strategies and Program and Policy Insight, LLC, are the national evaluators of NFWS grant recipients.

⁴⁶ NFWS hired IMPAQ International to conduct the impact evaluation of local workforce partnerships receiving NFWS/SIF funds.

This report assesses employer, worker, funder, and system outcomes using quantitative and qualitative indicators. The evaluation design included surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as well as existing quantitative data collections. Features of the Workforce Central evaluation are further detailed below by data source:

EMPLOYERS

The CEO Peer Council and HR Liaison Group of the Manufacturing Partnership provided information on the local impact of industry partnerships from a business perspective. During a two-hour focus group with four key employers, COWS solicited responses on local industry dynamics, employer practices, business and worker outcomes, and employer engagement. CEO Peer Council members also shared recommendations for achieving program sustainability and systems change. A separate focus group of four HR Liaisons yielded feedback on training effectiveness, program logistics, and hiring and retention practices.

WORKERS

COWS conducted two worker focus groups: 1) incumbent workers participating in the Manufacturing Leadership Program (four focus group participants), and 2) job seekers participating in either the Food Manufacturing Science Certification Program or the Pathways Accelerated GED/Occupational training (seven focus group participants). The focus groups collected information on program relevance, participant experience, and training barriers and challenges.

FUNDERS

Spring of 2011, COWS surveyed the Workforce Central Funders Collaborative. The survey identified acceptance and prioritization of Workforce Central's goals. COWS later used the survey responses to inform the focus group design. The Funders Collaborative focus group collected additional feedback from nine members on the Collaborative's goals, worker and business outcomes, partner engagement, and progress towards systems change.

SYSTEM

Eight members of the Service Provider Network participated in a focus group addressing progress and challenges faced by the public workforce system, educational training providers, and nonprofits. As advocates for workers, the focus group participants also provided insight into the experiences of dislocated and disadvantaged individuals. COWS also conducted a follow-up interview with representatives from the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) and the Labor Education and Training Center (LETC) to gain further detail on the public system's investment in advanced manufacturing training.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Pre-existing quantitative data includes training program outcomes provided by Mid-State Technical College, NCWWDB, and Wood County Human Services, along with selected demographic data approved for release by program participants.

In 2011, Workforce Central transitioned from foundational work to implemented training programs. The following sections assess progress made during this implementation phase through November 30, 2011.

Workforce Central's partnership in advanced manufacturing stands as its most mature to date. The partnership boasts extensive local industry and service-provider engagement, and offers a breadth of services to the dual customer. Fifteen (and growing) employer-participants provide jobs for 3,500⁴⁷ regional workers and represent a range of core industries: pulp and paper, food manufacturing, chemical processing, and fiberglass fabrication (see Table 1 on next page).

Workforce Central offers partners a menu of benefits and technical assistance including: 1) professionally-facilitated, executive-level conversation and collaboration via the CEO Peer Council, 2) customized organizational training assessments, 3) worker training grants, 4) dissemination of best practices in workforce and economic development, and 5) targeted training and student support developed in close concert with members of the Service Provider Network. 2011 project outcomes and opportunities emanating from the partnership training are the focus of this section.

- The partnership set forth the following near-term training-related goals for the 2011 project year:
- Construct a system for **supervisory training** that meets employer needs.
- Develop a program to equip participants with the skills and competencies required within the growing **food manufacturing sector**, and provide students with portable credentials.
- Provide a forum for discussion of broader business issues that have a significant impact on training and the ability to hire permanent staff (e.g., the rising costs of health care and workers' compensation insurance lead some employers to contract with temporary agencies).

These goals stood amidst enduring priorities and longer-established holistic goals developed at the inception of the Manufacturing Partnership in 2009. The partnership's long-term goals are aimed at facilitating a culture shift that optimizes the relevance and effectiveness of the local workforce training system:

- Influence the way current employers in advanced manufacturing think about, train, and engage their employees in growing their business (across local industry).
- Deepen the understanding of support service providers about their roles in workforce development.
- Strengthen the connection between providers of training and employers so that training becomes demand-driven and confidence is built between employers and trainers.
- Enlarge the vision of regional workers to include employment in emerging companies and those outside the paper-making industry.

“I think we did some good work. People got some education. I think they got a little bit of morale boost. When you lose your job that’s tough . . . That little bit of education, and little bit of investment from the community into those people, gave them the confidence to (get a job).”
– Employer

“We as employers have benefited greatly, because (the Manufacturing Leadership Program) allowed us to put several supervisors, which is the toughest job in the plant . . . front-line folks directing the workforce, on the same page. We have employees saying that our supervisors are getting better.”
– Employer

⁴⁷ This number is an approximation. Total employees at a firm generally expands and contracts (e.g., food manufacturing employment swells with returning, seasonal workers during relevant harvest periods).

The 2011 project year resulted in successful execution of two Manufacturing Partnership training pilots meant to bridge the current skills mismatch between the area's traditional workforce and the jobs (and advancement opportunities) available in stable and emerging industries: 1) the Manufacturing Leadership Program and 2) the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program. The following discussion describes individual, employer, and service provider outcomes for each program, as detailed by focus group participants and partnership data.

Table 1

MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIP COMPANIES AND PARTICIPATION

<i>Business Name</i>	<i>Number of Employees</i>	<i>Location (city, village, town)</i>	<i>Main Products or Services</i>	<i>CEO Peer Council</i>	<i>Funders Collaborative</i>	<i>Mfg. Leadership</i>	<i>Food Mfg. Science</i>
Corenso	101-200	Wisconsin Rapids	Paperboard Cores	X	X	X	
Del Monte	201-500	Plover	Food Mfg.				X
ECC	51-100	Wisconsin Rapids	Storage Solutions	X		X	
ERCO	51-100	Port Edwards	Chemicals	X	X	X	
Fey Printing	51-100	Wisconsin Rapids	Printing	X			
Figis	201-500	Marshfield	Food Mfg.				X
Foremost Farms	51-100	Plover	Food Mfg.	X			
Badger State Fruit Processing	30-50	Pittsville	Food Mfg.				X
Golden County Foods	101-200	Plover	Food Mfg.	X			X
Intevation Food Group	51-100	Plover	Food Mfg.				X
Kickapoo	51-100	Sherry	Food Mfg.	X		X	X
Mariani	51-100	Wisconsin Rapids	Food Mfg.	X	X	X	X
McCain Foods	500+	Plover	Food Mfg.	X		X	X
NewPage	500+	Biron	Paper	X	X	X	
Ocean Spray	101-200	Wisconsin Rapids	Food Mfg.	X	X	X	X

BEST PRACTICES

Workforce Central's Manufacturing Partnership exhibits several best practices for employer-driven training collaboratives.

MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

- **Getting collaboration right achieves “skills match”:** Ongoing, close collaboration between the right technical college leaders and executive-level management of local manufacturing firms produced a successful training program that stands as a model for system achievement of the “skills match.” Industry has long expressed frustration with the public workforce system’s⁴⁸ inconsistency in developing training programs and graduates that meet the needs of the shop floor, especially in the dynamic environment of global manufacturing. Workforce Central’s Manufacturing Leadership Program answered this call for change.
- **Hands-on employer role in program development has real results in the classroom:** The Manufacturing Leadership Program elicited a depth of engagement by advanced manufacturing executives that went beyond strategy discussion to hands-on involvement with curriculum design, program delivery decisions, and the recruitment/screening of instructors. This heightened level of employer engagement showed in the classroom. Students praised the on-the-job relevance of the training, and instructors “from industry” whose style and experience resonated with adult learners.
- **Effective collaboration yields dual-customer, multi-sector benefits:** 1) Students gained immediately applicable, shop-floor-ready supervisory skills while simultaneously amassing educational credit/credentials that make them more competitive in a dynamic labor market, 2) employers gained skilled workers contributing to firm productivity, cost savings, and reduced turnover, 3) workforce training providers gained a more effective feedback loop from industry with actively engaged employers helping achieve the right program/skills match.

FOOD MANUFACTURING SCIENCE CERTIFICATE (FMSC) PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

- **Model commitment from the public workforce system supports a pilot certificate program:** A generous commitment of financial and human resources from the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) enabled the development of a Food Manufacturing Science certification, long sought by industry to remediate critical skill gaps within the local labor force. Due to resource constraints, the local technical college had previously tabled program development. Workforce Investment Act dollars served as the crucial lever for the creation of a pilot program with potential for Pell Grant eligibility.
- **Quality employer engagement marks systems change:** The Food Manufacturing Science Program benefited from a rare intensity and quality of employer engagement – from hands-on assistance with curriculum design and instructor screening to provision of internships and program marketing. CEO Peer Council members also showed great enthusiasm for engaging students during the recruitment process. This depth of engagement with the workforce system, in itself, signals a material change in employer practice.
- **Success rests on enhanced case management:** The case management feature of FMSC (including wrap-around support services provided by the Labor Education and Training Center) employed to proactively address barriers common to adult learners proved key to student success. Support included tutoring, transportation assistance, subsidized software, unemployment benefits continuation, and mortgage assistance. More importantly, the particular case manager offered not only practical services, but also the critical emotional encouragement to carry students through intense periods of self-doubt and frustration. Students described the case manager as tireless, conscientious, immensely resourceful, empathetic, and approachable. Student success bolstered the argument for enhanced case management services targeted at dislocated workers, as well as the recruitment and cultivation of social service provider talent.

⁴⁸ This includes the array of publicly-funded institutions dedicated to training and support service delivery around training, inclusive of community and technical colleges, public universities, the K-12 system, Workforce Investment Boards, the Department of Workforce Development, and so forth.

MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

- Targeting incumbent workers across participating Manufacturing Partnership businesses.
- Addressing two workforce issues: 1) forecasted shortage of qualified supervisors driven by projected retirements across manufacturing subsectors, and 2) observed inconsistencies in management technique and execution due to rapid promotions of employees from floor to supervisor.
- Four stackable training certificates leading to an associate degree as employees choose to proceed in certificate attainment.
- Three to four courses per certificate; each course 12 weeks long.
- Each course modeled on an “accelerated learning” pace of six, four-hour classroom sessions every other week during the twelve weeks; generally meeting from 10am to 2pm.
- Choice to attend one of two scheduled sections (one section meeting every other Wednesday, the other every other Thursday), allowing students who may have to miss a class due to unanticipated shift work an opportunity to attend the alternate section.
- Instruction provided by Mid-State Technical College – Wisconsin Rapids campus; instructors and curriculum vetted by employer-partners.
- Students recruited in-house, the majority of whom were promoted to a supervisory role prior to training.

- **Small cohorts optimize outcomes:** A widely recognized best practice for adult learners, but a worthy one to note nonetheless, is the relatively small cohort size of the Food Manufacturing Science Program, which facilitated better learning outcomes for an intense, accelerated program. In addition, the shared experience of being displaced from a previous job fostered trust and understanding among the FMSC students, fueling a support network that softened their transition.

“It’s more of a homogeneous group. They’re all in a similar situation and they’re here because they are dislocated workers. And I think that’s huge. When you take into consideration how 18 of them made it through and (only) two dropped out, it’s because of that. And that’s what we’ve told the second group (of recruits) . . . ‘work together, and work through this whole program together, and you’ll have much more success.’”⁴⁹

– Service Provider

PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES: MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Manufacturing Leadership Program arose from two executive observations: 1) a deficit of manufacturing employees with sufficient managerial skills to replace supervisors (i.e., Chief Operators), and 2) inconsistent managerial methods among current supervisors due to rapid plant expansions. Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State) worked with the CEO Peer Council to adapt its Supervisory Management program to fit this need.

The Manufacturing Leadership Program targets incumbent workers, and consists of four stackable training certificates (requiring three to four courses each). The certificates lead to an Associate Degree in Supervisory Management. Each course is twelve weeks long and composed of six, four-hour sessions every other week. This is a rigorous format based on an “accelerated learning” model that compresses a traditional, semester-long course of 42 credit hours into 24 credit hours. Partnership businesses hand-pick candidates for training based on current or projected skill needs and observed individual potential. The majority of participants are current supervisors or team leaders.

Incumbent Workers

QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES (SEE TABLE 2)

Of the 79 incumbent workers participating in the Manufacturing Leadership Program to date, 71 have completed at least one course. Participants have earned a total of 18 certifications. Two incumbent workers have advanced in their companies so far as a result of the training.

- Mid-State has provided multiple sections of five courses offered, including Supervision, Personal Skills for Supervisors, Leadership, Managing for Quality, and Team Building and Problem Solving.
- High average GPA among incumbent workers.
- Seventy one of 79 participants have completed at least one course (four left the program because they left the employing company).
- Eighteen certifications earned.
- Career advancements for two students as a result of training (the majority already in supervisory roles).

Table 2

MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS, PROJECT YEAR 2011

<i>2011 Class (recruitment from August 2010)</i>	
Recruitment Candidates	79
Participants	79
Cumulative Courses Taken by Participants	157
Participants Completing at Least One Course	71
Participants Achieving a Certification	18
Grade Point Average	3.72
Career Advancement As a Result of Training ⁱ	2
Percent Still Employed in Industry Sector	97%

Note:ⁱ ERCO 1, Ocean Spray 1, Corenso 0, Mariani 0, McCain 0, ECC 0

COURSES OFFERED IN MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Supervision

- Supervision
- Leadership Development
- Personal Skills for Supervisors

Team Leadership

- Team Building & Problem Solving
- Managing for Quality
- Project Management
- MSSC Certification

Organizational Leadership

- Human Resources Management
- Legal Issues for Supervisors
- Diversity & Change Management
- Organizational Development

Quality Management

- Introductory Statistics
- Applied Data Analysis
- Managing for Quality
- Project Management
- Team Building & Problem Solving

QUANTITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP TRAINEES (SEE TABLE 3)

(Note: Data provided only for those participants who reported it on their enrollment form and signed a data release; does not represent total participants.)

Table 3
DEMOGRAPHICS OF MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PARTICIPANTS

Age	14-18	19-21	22-29	30-54	55-69	70+
Number of Participants	0	0	15	54	5	0
Education	8th Grade or Lower	Grade 9-12 (No HSD)	HSD (or Equiv.)	Some College	4+ Years College	
Number of Participants	0	0	72	33	20	
Gender	Male	Female				
Number of Participants	61	14				

QUALITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP TRAINEES⁵⁰

Focus groups corroborated that most students already held supervisory roles (a minority in operator roles). Students generally had supervisory experience, but it was limited in tenure, thereby keeping with the program’s goal of bringing “future company leaders” up to speed on skills and technique.

“(The plant manager’s) got all his supervisors . . . the longest years of service, supervisory wise, is maybe four years. We’re all relatively new to supervisory roles. And he’s trying to get us all on the same page. There are five supervisors going to it and four team coordinators. He just wants us all to have the same tools to get involved at work.”⁵¹

– Incumbent Worker

Some students had a previous attachment to Mid-State, having attended in the past, either for other formalized college programming or daylong company-sponsored training.

Most focus group participants managed work and family, with spouses and children.

KEY FINDINGS: INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES WITH ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Benefits

Incumbent workers shared the following positive take-aways from the classroom experience:

- Exposure to mid-level workers from other companies and other manufacturing subsectors fueled student interest in the common, cross-sector challenges faced by supervisors;
- A welcoming classroom setting where students could get to know and bond with their co-workers;
- Instructors with obvious industry experience, and demonstrated flexibility and enthusiasm for student success.

“The instructors also have a lot of good background in the industry and they give us a lot of feedback on their prior jobs.”⁵²

– Incumbent Worker

“They’re (the instructors) out of the industry. That’s what’s nice. He (the instructor) gives examples. He knows what we’re going through. He’s been there. That’s nice.”⁵³

–Incumbent Worker

⁵⁰ Qualitative demographics are derived from 2011 Incumbent Worker Focus Group responses.

⁵¹ Incumbent Worker Focus Group

⁵² Incumbent Worker Focus Group

⁵³ *Id.*

Challenges

Participants shared challenges, many of them typical of returning adult learners who are working full-time. Other challenges reflected the administrative and logistical “learning curve” common to implementing new programs. Cited challenges include:

- Reconciling the competing demands of attending class, completing homework, working full-time, and managing the responsibilities of family (a premier challenge for adult learners);
- Managing work and class schedules (along with family time commitments) fueled doubts about continuing to the Associate Degree;
- Difficulty being positive about the value of advanced skills in manufacturing when employees consistently see restructuring in the industry (job security fears);
- Occasional confusion over what instructors expected (e.g., a misunderstood requirement that homework be completed before the first class meeting; a tactical communication glitch representative of the logistical learning curve);
- Apprehension over course content in future stacked certificates – appearing much more technical and requiring the completion of statistics and applied data analysis courses;
- Overcoming self-confidence issues common with a return to the classroom after a long period in the workplace;
- Struggles with the 10am to 2pm regular meeting time, particularly for those students working night shifts.

KEY FINDINGS: WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

- Participation in the Manufacturing Leadership Program encouraged fellow student-employees to develop workplace-based mutual support systems for homework and study skills.
- Students utilized space and resources offered by partnership businesses for outside study groups and meetings.

KEY FINDINGS: JOB IMPACTS AND EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

- Participants regarded the course content as extremely relevant to their jobs; courses helped them understand the gaps in skills and lack of consistency in supervisory techniques described by CEOs and management.
- Most students found immediate application for newly learned supervisory skills. Students mentioned “Six Sigma” and “benchmarking” as examples of techniques they employed immediately.
- Participants felt that Mid-State’s training was much more useful and beneficial than the training they received through internal HR in the past – the training was immediately applicable on the job, and it conferred formal credits that the larger labor market recognizes (“portable credentials”).
- Students expressed gratitude for employers offering them the opportunity and resources to participate in the program.

Employers

EMPLOYER CHARACTERISTICS

Companies participating in the Manufacturing Leadership Program span the range of local manufacturing subsectors – from Corenso, the core board manufacturer with deep connection to the region’s pulp and paper industry, to ERCO Worldwide, a specialty chemicals processor in Port Edwards. Strong advocates for the program also include regional anchors of the expansive food manufacturing sector: Mariani Packing Company, Kickapoo Valley Cheese Corp., and Ocean Spray Cranberries.

Each of these employers sees training and the creation of effective training systems as critical to competitive business operations and sustainability, as well as to a community in transition. Not one of these firms is a stranger to plant retooling or global restructuring which demand quick adaptability for plant survival. CEO Peer Council members prove themselves, time and again, to be stewards not only of their own operation, but of the entire community through partnership with Workforce Central and related community-driven economic development efforts.

Table 4

EMPLOYERS SENDING STUDENTS TO MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP TRAINING

<i>Company</i>	<i>Number of Employees in Training</i>
Corenso	12
ECC	7
ERCO	18
Kickapoo	5
Mariani	14
McCain	5
NewPage	8
Ocean Spray	10
Total	79

KEY FINDINGS: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND ASSISTANCE

Funding

Funding leveraged from employers for the Manufacturing Leadership Program to date totals \$22,443 in cash contribution.⁵⁴

Other Employer Engagement and Assistance

- **Selecting Instructors:** Employers collaborated with Mid-State on selecting instructors, as well as vetting them for industry experience that would translate well to incumbent workers/adult learners.
- **Direct Advising on Curriculum and Delivery Modifications:** While employers were generally pleased with the form and quality of the supervisory curriculum already in place at Mid-State, employers did meet with the college when and where they saw the need for minor tweaks in curriculum or modifications in delivery.
- **Internal Recruitment and Provision of HR Resources:** Employers took time to internally identify employees they felt would be good candidates for the program, and dedicated internal human resources staff to scheduling and facilitating incumbent workers in the program.

⁵⁴ The total training cost is \$160,031 with \$65,574 yet to be billed for future classes under the WAT grant. The total WAT grant for Manufacturing Leadership training is \$72,014, or 45 percent of the total cost.

KEY FINDINGS: BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES REALIZED BY PARTICIPATING EMPLOYERS

High Praise from Partnership Businesses on Training Service Delivery and Responsiveness; Model of a System “Skills Match” for Employers

- Partnership businesses expressed great satisfaction with curriculum content and instruction. CEOs praised Mid-State’s responsiveness to employer needs in designing the program to ensure relevant content, good instructor fit, and workplace relevance.
- Companies were pleased with Mid-State’s flexibility to make adjustments along the way based on industry and student feedback.
- CEOs perceived the program as modeling a successful “skills match” in workforce development because it addresses an enduring criticism of the public workforce system⁵⁵ – the inability to provide vocational training relevant to actual local business needs.

Unilateral Satisfaction on Shop Floor Outcomes

- CEOs viewed the program as successfully addressing the supervisory skill gap.
- The companies saw/are seeing immediate results on the shop floor (e.g., supervisors now consistently employ the same managerial principles and demonstrate better understanding of the business; employees have commented on the enhanced quality of supervision).

Value and Cost Savings Achieved

- Employers find training very cost effective, “a value” in comparison to resources required for the same training in-house or the cost of customized training for a single company.
- Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grant funding leveraged from the public sector captured a 45 percent cost savings for employers (see below on WAT grant contribution).

⁵⁵ The public workforce system includes an array of publicly funded training delivery and support institutions such as technical colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, and social service providers.

Service Providers

KEY FINDINGS: SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRIBUTIONS OF FUNDING AND TRAINING SERVICES

Funding

Public sector partners provided leveraged funding for the Manufacturing Leadership Program in the form of a Workforce Advancement Training (WAT) grant of \$72,014.

Service Provision: A Quality Educational Product with Flexibility⁵⁶

Employers were mostly satisfied with Mid-State's preexisting certificates and Associate Degree program in Supervisory Leadership, but the college also offered institutional flexibility throughout to make requested modifications and bend to scheduling needs.

"For the supervisory training, the employers like the associate degree structure that we have set, so we are utilizing that structure."⁵⁷

– Service Provider

And the other thing that we've done in working with John Bergin and Rick Merdan in the CEO Peer Council is create a schedule that provides great flexibility to allow their (companies') shift workers to participate in the training."⁵⁸

– Service Provider

KEY FINDINGS: BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES REALIZED BY SERVICE PROVIDERS

Collaboration Fostered the Ability to Leverage Funding for Training Subsidy

Mid-State viewed the ability to leverage funding through collaboration in the Manufacturing Partnership (for the Manufacturing Leadership and Food Manufacturing Science programs) as both a benefit for the college and a contribution to the community.

"For the supervisory training we've been able to leverage, apply and receive Workforce Advancement Training grants for technical college assistance, so we've been successful in three grant applications. So that's subsidizing the training for the incumbent workers that are participating."⁵⁹

– Service Provider

Direct Access to a Breadth of Local Employers a Benefit in Itself and Inspiration for Seeing New Potential in Mid-State Industry Advisory Committees

Representatives from Mid-State not only relayed the tremendous benefits realized by direct, executive-level access to (and collaboration with) a broad set of local manufacturing employers, but also noted that the opportunity motivated them to rethink the potential of Mid-State's industrial advisory committees. Focus group participants explained that, in years past, the advisory committee in manufacturing was dominated by the largest employer in the region. When that company restructured and changed leadership, creating new programs for the broader manufacturing community became a paramount challenge. The current iteration of the industry advisory committee is broader in its representation of multiple voices in manufacturing, and Mid-State sees increased potential for its industry engagement, in part, due to involvement with this project.

⁵⁶ The scope of service provision (i.e., training and wrap-around support) for the Manufacturing Leadership Program was weighted towards training as incumbent workers do not face the same set of challenges requiring the intense case management and wrap-around support found in other Workforce Central training programs.

⁵⁷ Service Provider Focus Group

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Service Provider Focus Group

LESSONS LEARNED AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD FOR THE MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Focusing on Incumbent Workers, a Gateway to Robust Engagement by Employers

Focusing on incumbent workers first, by developing the Manufacturing Leadership Program with employers, proved a critical strategy for building out the other training components of the Manufacturing Partnership, including the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate (FMSC) program. In and of itself, the focus on incumbent workers is critical to moving existing workers toward better wages and skills. Furthermore, incumbent workers are not a population readily served by workforce partnerships as they cannot be trained with WIA funds. The relationships built, and fruitful collaboration realized, by the employers through development of the Manufacturing Leadership Program led to further employer participation in job-seeker training. For the employer-partners, job seekers were a lesser-known population requiring a different type of support and nurturing than incumbent workers.

Employer Facilitators Critical to Keep Industry Engaged and to Elicit Industry's Perspective

The employment of time and expertise by Peer Council Facilitators with extensive background in private industry was a key component of program success. John Bergin and Rick Merdan readily established a level of trust with employers who valued their industry background. These employer-facilitators could also anticipate prospective business responses to strategies offered by members of the Service Provider Network, creating long-term efficiencies in collaboration.

Concerns Over Program Saturation and Limited Interest Reinforces Need for More Effective Recruitment Strategies

Employers and service providers alike expressed concern that reductions in the pipeline (among participating firms) of potential Manufacturing Leadership students threatens the viability of the program. This speaks to a need already recognized by Workforce Central to expand the number and breadth of businesses participating in the Manufacturing Partnership's training opportunities.

Employers shared a related concern: some employees decline advancement to supervisory positions. The problem is of growing importance, given the impending need to replace retiring supervisors. This reflects a persistent issue for rural communities: the scale of the community and its ability to attract new talent, as well as the need to better market manufacturing as a viable profession.

Replication of Mid-State's Supervisory Curriculum In-House Complicates Discussion of Program Sustainability and Systems Change

Some participating employers shared plans to import elements of the Manufacturing Leadership curriculum in-house (i.e., as part of their "corporate university" trainings). While this is certainly beneficial for employers and workers, it naturally bypasses the technical college system in the long term. Employers also continue to use other training providers—like the American Management Association—for supervisory classes. This complicates the discussion for ideal outcomes of "systems change."

Time Issues Impact Program Effectiveness

Employers and service providers involved in the launch of the Manufacturing Leadership Program recognize the utility in allowing more lead-time between the onset of incumbent worker recruitment and the actual start of training. This would provide workers and HR staff more time to anticipate any scheduling issues and to understand expectations (particularly requirements that work be prepared prior to the first day of class).

Focus groups gleaned enough mention of the difficulty of the 10am to 2pm time period to warrant revisiting the schedule. As noted below, the schedule may have an adverse impact on learning for third-shift workers:

*"The only challenge I've heard was time. They work 'til 5 in the AM and they go home and sleep three hours . . . go to class, and try to stay awake and engaged."*⁶⁰
 – Employer

PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES: FOOD MANUFACTURING SCIENCE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

The Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program is designed for job seekers (WIA dislocated worker or adult programs) with baseline skills and experience, but needing training upgrades for future employability. The program aims to build a local workforce with the skills needed for the burgeoning food manufacturing sector. Food processing has emerged as a principle growth industry in south Wood County, requiring a pipeline of employees equipped to deal with emerging global food safety concerns.

The FMSC requires twenty (20) credit hours completed in 34 weeks*, and includes the industry-recognized Manufacturing Skill Standard Certification (MSSC). Students are in the classroom at Mid-State Technical College an intense four days a week, for sixteen to twenty hours per week on average. In addition, they must complete a 72-hour internship at a local food manufacturer. The program includes intensive case management and wrap-around support to address the barriers that confront returning adult learners populations en route to a new credential and sustainable employment. This critical service is supported financially by the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) and coordinated by the local Labor Education and Training Center (LETC) of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, both vital members of the Service Provider Network. Students generally learned about the program through the job center or LETC case manager, or via a local staffing agency. Interested individuals were required to go through a screening process which included provision of a work history/resume, as well as various WorkKeys⁶¹ assessments delivered by LETC.⁶²

FOOD MANUFACTURING SCIENCE CERTIFICATE – PROGRAM SNAPSHOT

- Targets job seekers (WIA program participants).
- Aims to produce a skilled workforce for jobs in growing local food manufacturing sector as the sector struggles to find a qualified pipeline of local workers.
- Twenty credit-hour certification program.
- First cohort: 22 Weeks; Second cohort (now in training): 34 Weeks (Program expansion based on feedback).
- Students in classroom four days per week for an average of 16 to 20 hours.
- 72-hour internship at local food manufacturer.
- Intensive case management and wrap-around support provided by LETC.
- Application and screening assessment procedure.
- Instruction (by an SQF Certified auditor) provided by Mid-State.
- Students recruited via case managers, job center postings, and staffing agency.

⁶⁰ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

⁶¹ www.act.org/workkeys/

⁶² A portion of the leveraged funds (\$2,400) from the Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NWWDB) financed WorkKeys assessments.

COURSES OFFERED IN FOOD MANUFACTURING SCIENCE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

Computer Basics – provides instruction in general computer systems (hardware, software, data, and users); logging into the MSTC network; basic commands and features of Windows; and introductory elements of email and the Internet.

Prep for Basic Chemistry – introduces basic principles of chemistry including the properties of matter, atomic structure, and the classification of chemical reactions. Students learn to characterize solutions, acids, and bases, and differentiate between elements and compounds.

General Biology – introduces the general concepts and principles of biology with emphasis on cell structure and function, genetics, evolution, and taxonomical relationships (4 credits).

Beginning Laboratory Science – introduces the learner to the fundamentals of laboratory procedures. The emphasis will be on lab safety, equipment utilization and maintenance. An introduction to scientific methodology will be included. Basic laboratory math will be discussed and utilized (3 credits).

Food Laboratory Science – learners perform experiments unique to food processing and food safety. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and bio-security are covered (3 credits).

Supervised Field Experience – introduces the learner to fundamentals of current good manufacturing practices (CGMP), sanitation standard operating procedures (SSOP), concepts of food safety, and personal hygiene. The course integrates skills developed in the classroom with specific occupational experiences at local employment sites and develops appropriate work behaviors (3 credits).

Core Manufacturing Skills – provides instruction in the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) areas of safety, quality practices measurement, manufacturing processes and production, and maintenance awareness. Participants will test in each MSSC area; participants will earn MSSC certification in each area passed and will earn the “Certified Production Technician” credential if successful in all four areas (4 credits).

Microsoft Office-Introduction – develops skills in the Microsoft Office Suite (Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and Outlook) while reinforcing the students’ knowledge of computer concepts, Windows Explorer and Internet usage through demonstrations and lab exercises (3 credits).

“The biology and chemistry is something these (employers) are asking for. They are the ones that came up with this curriculum. Since it’s important to them, it’s important to me.”

– FMSC Participant

*The first graduated cohort, evaluated here, completed a program designed for twenty-two weeks. This was subsequently lengthened to 34 weeks for the second cohort (currently in training). The second cohort will complete classroom work in June 2012.

Job Seekers

QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES FOR COHORT ONE (SEE TABLE 5)

Eighteen participants completed coursework, with 16 receiving the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate.

- 71 percent of recruited candidates assessed:
 - WorkKeys Applied Math, minimum level: 4
 - WorkKeys Reading for Information, minimum level: 5
 - WorkKeys Locating Information, minimum level: 4
 - WorkKeys Teamwork, minimum level: 5
 - WorkKeys Applied Technology, minimum level: 3
 - Performance, minimum level: 70 percent
- 51 percent of candidates assessed chosen as participants
- Trainee pool split evenly between male and female
- Eighteen of 20 trainees completing coursework with 16 getting certificate
- High average GPA
- Sixteen internships attained and completed
- Twelve of 16 who completed certificate and internship obtained jobs

QUALITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF FMSC TRAINEES⁶³

- Over half of FMSC focus group participants indicated some family connection to the region – e.g., grew up in Central Wisconsin and returned to the region to be near family. Others followed a job here years ago and stayed.
- Based on descriptions of years of work experience, the age distribution of FMSC focus group participants was approximately 40 to 60 years old.
- Participant work histories varied – all participants were dislocated or experienced multiple layoffs throughout their work history. Industry experience ranged from manufacturing (shop floor and back-office administrative) to sales to farm work.

⁶³ Qualitative demographics are derived from 2011 Incumbent Worker Focus Group responses.

Table 5
**FOOD MANUFACTURING SCIENCE CERTIFICATE (FMSC) QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS,
 PROJECT YEAR 2011**

	<i>Cohort 1</i>	<i>Cohort 2</i>
Recruitment Candidates	55	33
Recruits Assessed	39	16
Participants	20	11
Demographics (of those that started the program):		
Male	10	7
Female	10	4
Total Courses Taken	152	
Participants Completing Coursework	18	
Participants Achieving a Certification	16	
Grade Point Average	3.71	
Internships Attained	16	
Internships Completed	16	
Job Placement	12	
Job Retention ⁱ	67%	
Average Pay	\$14.64	
Minimum	\$10.50	
Maximum	\$22.96	
Progress Measures:		
Average Pay Increase After Probationary Period	4%	
Percent Employed Still in Industry Sector	83%	

Note:^d Four of the 12 employed changed positions.

KEY FINDINGS: ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

Benefits

FMSC trainees shared the following positive take-aways from the classroom experience:

- Overall enjoyment of the classroom setting and from revisiting the learning process after years in the workforce;
- Across-the-board benefits to well-being and feelings of achievement fueled by returning to school and engaging with peers;
- Growing confidence with each incremental triumph and recognition that they were succeeding in a fast-paced, intense program *despite* initial trepidation over whether they would succeed as a returning adult-learner (several had been out of the classroom for 10 to 30 years);
- Demonstrated commitment, flexibility, and talent of certain classroom instructors.

Challenges

FMSC students shared the following challenges confronted in the classroom:

- Some difficulty with the pace and compressed schedule of the program – students really struggled in the first cohort (program was lengthened by several weeks for the second).
- Concern among some students (prior to completion) that portions of the curriculum would prove “irrelevant” on the actual manufacturing floor, e.g., pre-biology and pre-chemistry. One student said that he didn’t see how memorizing the parts of a cell would translate to a job in the plant.
- Frustration with the computer-guided instructional format of the Manufacturing Skill Standards Certification⁶⁴ (MSSC), a national curriculum with a required format. Students characterized the instructor as more of a “monitor” than teacher, expressing a desire for more interaction and discussion of concepts presented via the computerized curriculum.

- Students experienced recurring feelings of intimidation by the subject matter and testing, despite an overall increase in confidence.
- Some students internalized the expressed frustration of one instructor who appeared flustered with the amount of remedial instruction necessary to bring students up to speed.
- Students felt their own frustration with a few fellow students for being a “drag” on the group, exhibiting attitude problems and little motivation.
- Broadly shared difficulty managing the rigors of school with employment and familial responsibilities.
- Experienced students feared age-ism: despite years in the workforce and earning the food manufacturing certificate, students expressed great skepticism about the ability to secure new employment at middle-age.

KEY FINDINGS: ASSISTANCE THROUGH WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

- The case management piece of the FMSC program, and the LETC case manager, Corey Anfinson, in particular, received broad and repeated praise from students. Most participants indicated that they could not have completed the training without wrap-around support and without Corey’s talents.
- Students took advantage of critical support including: tutoring, transportation assistance (gas cards and mileage reimbursement), subsidized computer software (Microsoft Office Suite provided through a grant from In courage), one-on-one help with resume-writing and job/interviewing skills, and mortgage assistance.

KEY FINDINGS: EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

- Participants acknowledged and commended employer facilitation of the training program.
- Trainees expressed gratitude for the generosity and graciousness of employers who offered job shadowing and internship opportunities.

Employers

EMPLOYER CHARACTERISTICS

Manufacturing Partnership businesses helped develop and launch the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program, including McCain Foods, Mariani Packing Company, Kickapoo Valley Cheese Corp., and Ocean Spray Cranberries, among others. These companies all share the fortunate challenge of being a marquis growth industry in Central Wisconsin. Faced with significant shortages in areas like laboratory food safety skills and an imminent need to fill positions, it is commendable that they are creating a pipeline of qualified workers by engaging in a multi-stakeholder industry partnership to build local training capacity and connections to new populations of job seekers. The regional food manufacturing executives spearheading the FMSC have committed to a long-range view of sustainable training systems.

KEY FINDINGS: EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT AND ASSISTANCE FOR FMSC

- **Direct input on curriculum and delivery:** Employers worked with Mid-State to modify and enhance pre-existing food manufacturing curriculum to meet industry needs. Employers also advised on curriculum delivery and format.
- **Instructor recruitment:** Participating food manufacturers worked in concert with Mid-State and Workforce Central's CEO Peer Council Facilitators to recruit the right instructor talent with valuable food safety certifications and an ability to parlay industry experience in the classroom.
- **Participation in candidate information sessions:** CEOs and plant managers of FMSC employer-partners spoke at student recruitment sessions, providing background on the local food manufacturing sector, outlining its growth, and describing the opportunities available for workers who gain the right skills.

Table 6

FOOD COMPANIES HOSTING INTERNS FROM FMSC PROGRAM

<i>Company</i>	<i>Internships</i>
Del Monte	1
Figis	1
Badger State Fruit Processing	1
Golden County	1
Kickapoo Cheese	1
Mariani	6
McCain Foods	1
Ocean Spray	4
Total	16

- **Provision of job-shadowing opportunities:** FMSC companies provided valuable job shadowing opportunities while students were still completing classroom work. Participants gained initial exposure to multiple plant operations, shop floor technology, and safety procedures.
- **Coordination with Mid-State on internships:** The management and human resources staffs of FMSC companies spent significant time with the college on the coordination and execution of the 72-hour food manufacturing internships for students completing coursework. Both industry and Mid-State share the opinion that managing internships creates administrative challenges, but internships are quickly becoming a mainstay of many technical college programs.

KEY FINDINGS: BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES REALIZED BY EMPLOYERS THROUGH FMSC

A Formalized Ongoing Curriculum

Employers expressed great satisfaction that collaboration may result in a formalized, ongoing, Pell Grant-eligible program in food manufacturing at Mid-State that directly addresses the needs of the fast-growing regional food sector.

Adequate Preparation and Competence of Graduates

CEOs and plant managers found graduates prepared with the technical competence to perform the work.

Understanding and Empathy

Exposed to a new recruitment pool of displaced workers, executives expressed great empathy for the economic, emotional, and psychological challenges faced by graduates of the program. They felt proud to be part of a program that not only helps job seekers reskill, but also regain their morale.

Service Providers

KEY FINDINGS: SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRIBUTIONS OF FUNDING AND TRAINING SERVICES

Funding Contribution

Total WIA investment by the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board for the FMSC program was \$309,955 (for Round I of training and part of Round II). This encompassed Mid-State's instructor costs, the provision of WorkKeys assessments, drug screening, and direct service payments to participants for mileage reimbursement. The LETC case management services constituted an additional investment of \$115,997 under a WIA Dislocated Worker contract.

Service Provision

- **Mid-State's efforts provide a "skills match":** Mid-State Technical College representatives on the Service Provider Network expressed a sincere, deliberate effort to provide a "skills match" via the right curriculum and the right employee fit for food manufacturing employers.

*"And I think ultimately what we're providing to those folks is some good entry-level training; entry-level skilled people that could work for them. We're getting students to do internships so employers can get just a little glimpse of who these candidates are. I think we're providing them a path toward sustainability that this can continue, and we can continue to build a workforce that might better fill their entry-level needs."*⁶⁵

– Service Provider

- **LETC enhanced case management:** The Labor and Education Training Center (LETC), with Corey Anfinson as the lead case manager, provided extensive and intensive wrap-around support for FMSC students (e.g., transportation assistance, software, help with benefits continuation, resume building, and job interviewing skills), as well as much-needed encouragement and counseling. In addition, LETC played a central role in student recruitment and screening. Mid-State attributes the program success rate in large part to Corey's efforts.

"I would say we were perfect in the first group, 18 for 18, if you will, and that to some degree is a testament to the amount of time and effort that Corey is investing in each and every one of those individuals."⁶⁶

– Service Provider

KEY FINDINGS: BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES REALIZED BY PROVIDERS THROUGH FMSC

Mid-State Succeeding at Collaboration Toward a Better Employer Match

Mid-State Technical College representatives shared pride that the quality of collaboration with employers on the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate yielded an academic program and a set of instructors that truly meet the technical needs of employers.

"And so we pointed John (Bergin) in the direction of our laboratory science technician program and he reviewed that content (with us). Then the food processors came back and said, 'here's what we'd like to do'. There was an opportunity for John and the food manufacturers to look at that content and say, 'yeah, this is what we'd like to see happen.'⁶⁷

– Service Provider

"... we looked at who we had to do the instruction and the content, and the needs of the businesses, and we identified that there's one area that we really need someone (an instructor) who's an expert in this piece. And so we actually hired someone out of Milwaukee who would be up here two days a week and provide that piece of the instruction. And we're looking to continue that, so they (the employers) have some good input as to who the instructors are, what kind of credentials they bring."⁶⁸

– Service Provider

Partnership Provides Mid-State with a Sound Student Recruitment Pipeline

Mid-State commented on how the partnership with other members of the Service Provider Network (i.e., Job Service, LETC, Wood County Human Services) opened up access to a clear recruitment pool that they may have otherwise struggled to reach.

"One of two big things that I've seen is that the (FMSC) partnership helped us recruit. Or, bring people in that I think without the partnership we wouldn't even know who these people are, or know how to get in touch with them."⁶⁹

– Service Provider

All Providers See the Benefits of Case Management

"But then the other piece is there's something that's going on with Corey that is making these people really come as a cohort and work together and there's this, I don't know, sense of something that's keeping them together and it's keeping them motivated, working together, doing homework together, supporting each other. That we wouldn't typically see."⁷⁰

– Service Provider

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ Service Provider Focus Group

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

LESSONS LEARNED AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD FOR FMSC

Success of FMSC Required (and Requires) a Monumental Cultural Shift for Both Employers and Service Providers

Effective collaboration to achieve success with the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program required a tremendous degree of institutional learning and shift in mindset on the part of both employers and services providers. Service providers had to obtain more specific knowledge of the flexibilities (and inflexibilities) of business procedures and priorities. Employers had a steep learning curve when confronted with the complexities of the workforce system and the various needs of the populations it serves. While exciting, all of this learning exchange required a tremendous amount of “heavylifting”, time, and resources (provided by Workforce Central). Tasks included everything from the coordination of schedules and meeting planning, to the facilitation of content-heavy discussions, to tailored responses meeting a range of partner needs.

More Programmatic Strategy Building Could Solve Puzzling Student Recruitment Issues

The FMSC program experienced some puzzling difficulty with recruitment for the second round of certificate students. Some of this appears attributable to the timing of the second recruitment cycle, coinciding with an uptick in temporary/seasonal work opportunities. Other feedback from service providers suggests that the shock of displacement from higher-paid manufacturing jobs in the paper industry after years (sometimes decades) of tenure exacts a daunting emotional toll and feelings of lethargy. Coupled with a lack of confidence, these workers are discouraged from new pursuits in the short-term. The latter is a cultural issue Workforce Central is actively working to address. In addition, the community now registers a 6.5 percent unemployment rate, which might be correlated with recruitment difficulty (though this is difficult to determine given an overall jobs deficit). Some of these issues can be mitigated by the active local campaign to market the manufacturing sector and get new populations of workers to embrace its opportunities.

Sustaining the Quality and Intensity of Critical Case Management

FMSC program evaluation makes it abundantly clear that the case management piece is crucial for student success. Service providers note, however, that the particular intensity of case management put into this program is too resource-intensive to sustain for the long-term. The partnership must problem-solve on systems and policy levels to address case management sustainability.

Employer Enthusiasm to Engage with Participant Screening

While an admirable number of Food Manufacturing Science participants secured employment in partner firms, employers expressed hesitancy about making up-front commitments to hire graduates of the program. This proved frustrating to individuals who elected to go through the intense, condensed, and rigorous training, hopeful for a secure job at the end. Yet, focus group feedback from employers indicates a keen interest to get more closely involved in the student-recruitment, forecasting great potential for enhanced understanding of, and confidence in, FMSC participants with respect to hiring. Increased employer engagement in participant screening and explanation of employer hiring models would help manage student expectations.

Room to Better Manage Expectations Between Classroom and Shop Floor

Feedback from case managers indicates that some FMSC graduates currently in jobs perceive a mismatch between the variety of plant operations they were exposed to during the job shadowing or internship experience, and the reality of the permanent work (i.e., repetitive, limited to one area of plant operations, near the bottom of the occupational hierarchy). The Manufacturing Partnership has an opportunity to develop communication and instruction strategies to better manage student expectations.

Building Out “Soft-Skills” to Match Technical Skills Achievement

Employer-partners shared confidence in the technical skills and competencies of newly hired FMSC graduates, but registered disappointment in performance based on attitude. Related to the aforementioned mismatch in classroom-to-shop floor expectations, some new hires’ performance-levels deteriorated when they realized the job would be repetitive, near the bottom of the occupational hierarchy, and/or scheduled during an undesirable shift. Things like attitude, work ethic, and dependability are generally captured under the rubric of “soft skills” training, and employers and service providers wish to build more of this into the FMSC program.

Leveraging Resources to Replicate the Cohort Model

FMSC outcomes reiterated the long-known fact that small cohorts yield greater student success rates. Small cohorts, of course, are difficult to maintain in the public training system due to the perceived efficiencies of mass education. Collaboration on ways to maintain small cohorts for FMSC should be a focus in 2012. In many ways, FMSC proved the value of Workforce Investment Act dollars in testing and piloting small cohorts while meeting the need for a permanent, ongoing training solution for food manufacturing.

“Internships are Tricky”

The Food Manufacturing Science Certificate offers a 72-hour internship opportunity. Unforeseen circumstances with one of the employers initially reduced the number of internship opportunities available at the time of the focus groups, inciting some participant concern. Since then, however, every student who completed coursework received an internship opportunity. Fairly easy adjustments to the planning process may mitigate problems in the future. The technical college and employers share the view that internships are always “tricky” from an administrative standpoint, and glitches like this are typical and surmountable. Most new programming at Mid-State will carry an internship requirement.

Spearheaded by Wood County Human Services (as the partnership convener) and Mid-State Technical College (Mid-State), the Pathways Partnership is a model of how intermediaries can creatively leverage public programs to advance local workforce opportunities that often remain under the radar. Through a 50 percent local/50 percent federal match, the Pathways Program provides enhanced Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T), formerly known as Food Stamps Employment and Training or (FSET) services to low-income residents in Wood, Portage, and Adams Counties. The program has a primary focus of service delivery at the Wisconsin Rapids campus of Mid-State.

Pathways targets disadvantaged job seekers for accelerated GED and/or occupational training combined with wrap-around support services. These types of enhanced training models have proven successful at helping workers with multiple barriers achieve educational goals, gain steady employment, and increase earnings.

Mid-State Technical College tailored existing adult basic education (ABE) and post-secondary programs for the SNAP E&T population, including new delivery models and revised curricula. In its first year, the project offered three accelerated training tracks, two focusing on ABE and one providing post-secondary credentials.

BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

Academic Track One: Accelerated General Equivalency Diploma (GED) with Career Assessment, Job Seeking, Job Retention, and Computer Literacy lasts for 16 weeks with an average of 12 hours per week in the classroom.

Academic Track Two: Pre-College Preparation with Career Assessment and Computer Literacy prepares students for post-secondary occupational training through a series of pre-college courses. Training lasts for 16 weeks with an average of 12 hours per week in the classroom.

POST-SECONDARY TRAINING

Academic Track Three: Gerontology/Memory Caregiver Certificate with Job Seeking Skills and Job Retention Workshop uses a new Certified Nursing curriculum designed exclusively for Pathways participants to prepare them for the state of Wisconsin Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) exam. Students earn 12 credits over 19 weeks with an average of 16 hours per week in the classroom. Program credits ladder into an Associate Degree in Health.

Seamless integration of academic training and support services is a key goal of Pathways. Wood County Human Services provides dedicated, enhanced case management on location at Mid-State. County case managers recruit, prepare, and support students through the program. Financial and wrap-around benefits available to students include transportation vouchers, food subsidies, childcare assistance, and free training supplies and materials. Enhanced case management also includes weekly monitoring of student attendance and academic performance allowing for immediate intervention if needed.

“My favorite was the resume building . . . Our teacher was amazing . . . She really helped us know ourselves and present our best on that sheet of paper, because that’s what they’re going to judge us by first before they meet us. I thought that was really helpful.”

*– Job Seeker in
Pathways Program*

BEST PRACTICES GLEANED FROM PATHWAYS

Academic programming with on-site case management is a crucial success lever for all partners: The provision of enhanced case management located directly on-site at Mid-State Technical College not only successfully addressed barriers to completion for adult learners, but it also promoted communication and understanding between Mid-State instructors/administrators and Wood County Human Services staff. Instructors and administrators had easy access to the case manager who understood the daily challenges of students outside of the classroom. In turn, the case manager could communicate academic program guidance and solicit assistance for students from Mid-State directly. The simple act of co-locating case management and training created better information sharing between institutions.

“(We) always sent people Mid-State’s way without really working as Mid-State’s partner in that process, and now I really feel like we’re more of a partnership . . . Mid-State is now also sending people the Pathways’ way. And it’s not just from the people that are directly involved in the Pathways Project getting off the ground either. It’s people seeing the value to the program, to their general population of students, that might already be there.”⁷¹

– Service Provider

Pathways is a model for addressing “the Employment Question” in service provision: Although the employment status of any client is a central factor in determining that client’s level of need, not every social service institution is engaged in the direct provision of employment services. Answering “the employment question” for job seekers, in this instance, is a process of tapping into referral networks of job centers, temp agencies, and educational institutions to meet employment needs. Depending on the community, this network may be uncoordinated or lack effective communication channels. Focus group participants explained that the strength of institutional connections provided by the Pathways Partnership and the direct link to training programs answered “the employment question” for institutions that had otherwise struggled with this issue.

The Pathways design tackles the stigma attached to receiving social services: With educational training directly linked to a menu of social service supports, Pathways offers some protection from the regrettable stigma too often attached to those who receive public assistance by a national culture strongly wedded to particular notions of “self-reliance.”

“I also think that there’s a certain stigma to coming in (for) assistance at the job center. And when participants talk to their friends, they don’t necessarily say ‘I’m on W2.’ But when they’re in the Pathways Program they can say, ‘I’m involved in this program at Mid-State called the Pathways Program,’ which, with Mid-State involved, evokes a very good response . . . working towards self-sufficiency in a program that’s going to help them get educated.”⁷²

– Service Provider

Service providers exhibited an awareness that they are working for the dual customer: The dual customer (i.e., training that works for both the employer and worker) is a primary tenet of Workforce Central’s programming, as well as workforce development practice and policy across the country. Program evaluations thus look for evidence of the dual customer focus in language and practice. Pathways’ service providers expressly stated that their collaboration to ensure training programs for individuals was driven by industry needs and that existing jobs fueled participant recruitment.

“When we rewrote the certificates for Pathways, we really worked with Jennifer (Riggenbach) and she diligently ferreted out whether or not . . . with the certificates . . . if there would be employment at an entry level at the end of the certificate. And we ensured there would be an industry-recognized credential to help the participant gain employment. Why go through the training if there’s nothing at the end to help them get a job? And so I know that’s one of the things that we really looked at when putting this next course of certificates together.”⁷³

– Service Provider

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ Service Provider Focus Group

PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Disadvantaged Job Seekers

QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES (SEE TABLE 7)

The Pathways program trained 75 participants across the Gerontology, GED, and Pre-College tracks. Participants earned a total of 29 certifications. Thirty-two participants obtained jobs.

Table 7

PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP QUANTITATIVE SERVICE OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS, PROJECT YEAR 2011

	<i>Gerontology</i>	<i>GED</i>	<i>Pre-College</i>
Participants	14	44	17
Courses Taken	80	150	60
Participants Completing Coursework	12	20	15
Participants Achieving a Certification	13	16	
Job Placement	9	17	6
Average Pay	\$9.05	\$11.23	
Minimum	\$7.25	\$7.25	
Maximum	\$10.77	\$15.20	

QUANTITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF PATHWAYS PARTICIPANTS (SEE TABLE 8)

Table 8

DEMOGRAPHICS OF PATHWAYS PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPANTS, PROJECT YEAR 2011

<i>Age</i>	<i>14-18</i>	<i>19-21</i>	<i>22-29</i>	<i>30-54</i>		
Number of Participants	7	8	26	34		
<i>Education</i>	<i>8th Grade or Lower</i>	<i>Grade 9-12 (No HSD)</i>	<i>HSD (or Equiv.)</i>			
Number of Participants	2	44	29			
<i>Employment Status at Enrollment</i>	<i>Employed</i>	<i>Not Employed</i>				
Number of Participants	6	69				
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>				
Number of Participants	61	14				
<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Of Hispanic Origin</i>	<i>Not of Hispanic Origin</i>				
Number of Participants	9	66				
<i>Race</i>	<i>American Indian</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>African American</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Unknown/Missing</i>
Number of Participants	1	1	3	60	9	1

COURSES OFFERED IN PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Basic Ed Courses

- Accelerated GED
- Pre-College Preparation
- ESL Pre-College Preparation

Certificate Courses

- CNA – Gerontology/Memory Caregiver
- Occupational PC User

QUALITATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS OF PATHWAYS PARTICIPANTS

- Over half of Pathways focus group participants indicated some family connection to the region. Some participants grew up in Central Wisconsin and returned to be near family. Others have extended family in the area or followed a partner.
- Participant work histories varied – from dislocated manufacturing workers, to those with gaps in employment due to addiction and recovery issues, to women returning to the labor force after a long period of at-home child rearing.
- The majority of participants indicated that they had children at home.

KEY FINDINGS: ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

Benefits

Pathways participants shared the following positive take-aways from the classroom experience:

- Great satisfaction with instruction – *“Amazing . . . it actually was amazing.” “We had really good teachers . . . very caring.”* Students commented on how instructors took care that they did not feel intimidated.
- Student learning benefited from the small cohort/class size.
- Students experienced feelings of well-being and achievement from returning to school and learning among peers.
- Overall enjoyment of the classroom setting, and the learning process after years in the workforce.
- Increased student confidence resulted from incremental classroom triumphs (like FMSC students) and recognition that they were succeeding in a fast-paced, intense program, despite initial anxiety and self-doubt.
- Students expressed particular appreciation and enthusiasm for classroom work devoted to resume-building and interview skills.

“My favorite was the resume building. I don’t know why . . . Our teacher was amazing, we got to know ourselves. She told us how to put in our information and then they put it in a really neat format, a nice clean format. She sat down with us and helped us think of fun words that really make your resume jump out. She really helped us know ourselves and present our best on that sheet of paper, because that’s what they’re going to judge us by first before they meet us. I thought that was really helpful.”⁷⁴

– Job Seeker

Challenges

Pathways participants shared the following challenges faced as part of the classroom experience:

- Older students experienced recurring feelings of intimidation in the classroom, despite an overall increase in confidence.
- Some students were perceived to be “a drag” on the group (like FMSC participants), with evident attitude and motivational problems.
- Students struggled to manage the rigors of school with job and family obligations; however, Pathways participants noted that the childcare assistance made it easier.
- Students found it disorienting to have a course taught by two different instructors (one the first half, another the second).

KEY FINDINGS: WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

- Pathways students offered broad praise for the extensive and ongoing (beyond program completion) case management provided on-site at Mid-State by Stephanie Bender of Wood County Human Services.

“Stephanie was our go-to person. We needed anything? We had any issues? Any troubles? We went to her and she did what she could to help us out . . . She still calls me and says “this place is hiring, too.” And she’ll call to let us know about jobs, she’ll do anything, even if I don’t have a job and I still need somebody to talk to, I know I can call her, so even beyond the whole schooling she’s still there.”⁷⁵

- Students found gas cards and childcare particularly critical to their ability to enter and complete the program.

KEY FINDINGS: WORK EXPERIENCE

- Pathways focus group participants all experienced success with job placement: *“And you get a job out of this . . . I did. Actually, it’s in the profession!”⁷⁶*
- Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)/Gerontology students appreciated the job shadowing experiences provided by participating health care employers. It imparted confidence that they could apply and succeed doing the work they were trained to do. They appreciated that employers rotated them through different health care units.

⁷⁴ Job Seeker Focus Group

⁷⁵ Job Seeker Focus Group

⁷⁶ *Id.*

“(S)ince Pathways has started, and having that case management right on-site at Mid-State, you’re right in it, you know how it works, you’re directly involved in making those things happen, and I feel that’s really led to a lot more success.”

– Case Manager for Pathways Program

Service Providers

KEY FINDINGS: SERVICE PROVIDER CONTRIBUTIONS OF FUNDING AND SERVICES

Funding Contribution

Local realignment of resources plus an additional \$30,000 from the Workforce Central Funders Collaborative leveraged a federal SNAP E&T match of \$284,268.

Service Provision

- Mid-State Technical College in collaboration with Wood County Human Services modified existing adult basic education (ABE) curriculum and formulated a CNA/ Gerontology track with input from participating health care employers.
- Mid-State provided an ad hoc workshop on study skills upon recognizing the need during the course; pattern of responding quickly throughout the program to serve student needs.
- Transportation and childcare offerings were the most utilized wrap-around services for Pathways participants.

“(With) all the Pathways participants, they’re assisted with transportation and that can be in a variety of ways. It can be a taxicab to classes; it can be gas vouchers; it might be assistance obtaining a driver’s license so they can drive themselves to class. Day care is also one of the big ones for them.”⁷⁷

– Service Provider

- All service providers acknowledge the particular talents of Stephanie Bender (Wood County Human Services) as a crucial contribution.

“... and I think one of the key supportive services is Stephanie herself in the case management piece of it. As we talk about some of these things ... optimism and confidence, and that’s really the job of a case manager is to drive those things and those things can be bigger than some supportive services.”⁷⁸

– Service Provider

⁷⁷ Service Provider Focus Group

⁷⁸ *Id.*

KEY FINDINGS: BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES REALIZED BY PATHWAYS SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Service providers found that the Pathways collaboration better connected employers with the real needs of workers. They saw employers gain an enhanced understanding of, and interest in, the barriers this population of workers face.

“(Years ago) I remember trying to work with the employers on some of the services that we were providing . . . and it’s nonprofit, it’s low income, it’s needs, that really wasn’t their problem . . . it takes time for that culture to build . . . But I’d have to say 15 years ago I’m not sure that the employers were ready to help with transportation and childcare and make sure that people had the services that they needed in order to be successful.”⁷⁹

– Service Provider

- Case managers registered the many benefits of locating their services on-site at the technical college.

“Prior to Pathways starting, . . . we would work with people and kind of send them to Mid-State and then rely on them to report back how that was going for them . . . (S)ince Pathways has started, and having that case management right on-site at Mid-State, you’re right in it, you know how it works, you’re directly involved in making those things happen, and I feel that that’s really led to a lot more success.”⁸⁰

– Case Manager

- The technical college also commented on the many positive aspects of hosting case management on-site.

“And prior to Pathways we would have a lot of people that were on FoodShare sitting in our lab working on their academic skills, but then they weren’t getting the kind of support as far as transportation, a little bit more of one-on-one care relationships, childcare, those kinds of services. So we would see people that would come into the lab and then we wouldn’t see them for another couple of weeks because their car broke down . . . Having these extra services, we’re seeing more consistent attendance and completion of GED, HSED, and program preparation.”⁸¹

– Tech College Rep

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ Service Provider Focus Group

LESSONS LEARNED AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD FOR PATHWAYS

Training Job Seekers for Occupations is Not Enough—We Must Prepare Them for Occupational Training

Pathways job seekers come to the program with tremendous potential, but also with a wide range of needs that extend beyond the classroom. While they need targeted training to prepare for the workplace, they also require preparation and support to succeed in the occupational training itself. For Pathways, this preparation and support came in the form of intense case management. Participants needed the comprehensive financial support and high intensity case management to get through the many non-cognitive barriers to training.

Seize the Opportunity to Increase Employer Engagement in Pathways

Three health care employers provided helpful input toward modification of curriculum to create the CNA/Gerontology Track in Pathways. They also offered job-shadowing experiences for students. This hands-on engagement is encouraging as Workforce Central works to recruit more employer-partners to Pathways in the next project year.

Resource Constraints at Mid-State Threatens the Sustainability of Pathways

Like many public institutions, Mid-State is no stranger to post-recessionary budget cuts. The college puts up 50 percent of the funding for Pathways and questions how it can strategize to sustain that funding match going forward. Workforce Central has an opportunity to consider other funding options, including the role of philanthropy.

“For the Pathways Project it’s a 50/50 grant so the grant pays for 50 percent and actually Mid-State puts up the other 50 percent. And with the current economic climate and the cuts that the governor has made, it’s made Mid-State’s budget a lot tighter so we’ve had to get a little bit more creative and change some ways that we use staff. One of the examples is, with the textbooks . . . I collect them back from the participants when they’re done with them so we don’t have to keep buying them. It’s little things like that that will collectively make a difference in whether or not the program will be sustainable.”⁸²

—Tech College Rep

Pathways Reaches “Non-Traditional” Clients

Pathways service providers commonly serve clients who experience long-term unemployment and very low income. The recession has forced a change in their traditional client base with the addition of newly or recently jobless individuals who lack short-term resources to carry them through, or who are facing periods of unemployment that extend beyond what they had anticipated.

“We’ve always worked with a low-income base . . . it’s always been kind of the core of who we’ve worked with, but we’re seeing that extend itself out (to) non-traditional types of clients – people that always found a way to make it before, but now they can’t because of something that’s happened . . . some event, whether it’s an illness, or an accident, or a loss of a job, that has taken them over the edge into needing services that in the past they always found a way to kind of (get) by.”⁸³

—Service Provider

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ *Id.*

The Workforce Central Funders Collaborative pools, allocates, and oversees investments to improve the workforce system for both businesses and workers. In 2010, Collaborative members endorsed an “Ultimate Outcome,” as created by the Service Provider Network:

“Everyone in south Wood County who wants to work has ample opportunities to prepare for and secure a family-sustaining job and advance in a career over time. Current and prospective workers conveniently access a comprehensive, seamless array of education, training, and support services, provided by a strong partnership of employers, educators, and service providers that takes shared responsibility for a healthy workforce, economy, and job market.”

To achieve this goal, the Funders Collaborative has pursued a strategy of systems change characterized by:⁸⁴

1. Capacity building through shared *learning* and collaborative *relationships*.
2. Coordinated activity such as *pooled funding*, *dual-customer* programming, and common *measurement*.
3. Sustainability achieved through stakeholder *commitment*, financial and human *resources*, policy *advocacy*, and *jobs*.

Incourage began the process of systems change by engaging community leaders from the public, private, and philanthropic sectors. Community leaders participate in Workforce Central through many different avenues: the Funders Collaborative, training partnerships, CEO Peer Council and IT Sector Board, Service Provider Network, and the HR Liaison Group. These “Workforce Central stakeholders” each play a role in the initiative’s success.

This section identifies key findings and observations related to Workforce Central’s progress implementing its change strategy⁸⁵ through multi-sector collaboration, as described by Workforce Central stakeholders in a series of focus groups.

BEST PRACTICES

The Workforce Central collaboration model provides several best practices for training partnerships and broader systems reform.

Foundational work supports future collaborations and improves program implementation: In the decade that followed the sale of the paper company, Incourage Community Foundation invested time and resources developing local capacity for adaptive leadership, motivating new thinking, shifting attitudes, and engaging leaders to work across boundaries. Incourage secured donor and employer support for workforce development and built confidence in a collaborative approach to regional revitalization. These investments subsequently supported the ability of Workforce Central to

“A lot of groups could bring people together and have great conversations and come up with good ideas, but not everybody has the ability to pull (people) together in a way that generates results and also taps into resources.”
– Employer-Donor

⁸⁴ Focus groups with members of the Funders Collaborative, CEO Peer Council, and Service Provider Network described these elements of a change strategy.

⁸⁵ As derived from 2011 focus groups and Funders Collaborative Survey.

align and develop the region's workforce development assets for multi-sector partnerships. Extending beyond its traditional forms of investment, Incourage's commitment to this critical foundational work propelled local implementation of innovative training models.

“Training workers for jobs that exist” hastens the transition from training to employment: Despite the common pressure to ramp-up and fill training programs with dislocated and disadvantaged workers, Workforce Central adhered to a principle of “training workers for jobs that exist.” Commitment and courage, on the part of Workforce Central's stakeholders, proved the wisdom of this strategy. Employers, service providers, the technical college, and Workforce Central dedicated significant resources to design training programs that align student completion to employer hiring dates. As a result, twelve students successfully transitioned from training to employment, and the region has a model for meeting the needs of both employers and workers.

Viewing workforce development through an economic development lens. Employers are looking for solutions to their business challenges. Workforce Central approached employers as a strategic problem-solver with public system expertise and resources. The business and worker needs drove investment, not funding prospects. This focus prompted two ancillary best practices:

1. **Maintaining a dual-customer focus encourages employer investment:** Workforce Central furthered its goal of uplifting disadvantaged populations by adhering to its dual-customer strategy. Employers indicated a strong need for supervisory training among incumbent workers. The Funders Collaborative's broad approach to workforce investment enabled the initiative to capture employer participation by meeting a critical business need. This engagement led to business support of low-skill and job seeker training programs.
2. **Providing venues for discussing general business needs, including but not limited to, workforce development:** Unlike many industry partnerships, the Manufacturing Partnership and CEO Peer Council did not limit employer discussion to workforce issues. Rather, employers are encouraged to discuss shared business issues and ideas for reinvigorating the local economy. This approach maximized the value employers received from participating in the collaboration, while providing Workforce Central with a window into local business needs and practices.

Investments in economic development research made by the Funders Collaborative in 2011 promise additional opportunities for collaborative problem-solving on issues that unite workforce and economic development.

Executive-level engagement moves collaborations forward: Executive-level participation is critical to collaborative progress. Workforce Central stakeholders valued the active engagement of decision-makers. The ability to speak for the organization and commit resources hastened the implementation process.

“Absolutely key to the success was that the folks in the room could make the decision. The meetings where you say, let me check, let me go ask somebody else, I'll get back to you in a month, I got to check with legal, I got to check with HR, I got to check. This doesn't work if you do that. That's the one thing that most impressed me is we kept it at a level that said folks in the room can make the decisions in the best interests of their companies most of the time, if not all the time.”⁸⁶

– Employer

“They did approach it at a level (where) the people in this room and others represented on the Council for the most part are the senior person in the area, thereby having the most autonomy to make change –to decide how much money we're going to (invest) in this community and how much change we're going to make in our own workforce and our own site. So they did approach it at the appropriate level.”⁸⁷

– Employer

⁸⁶ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

⁸⁷ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Capacity Building

Systems change is a multi-step, iterative, and often weakly articulated process. A foundational phase brings members of disparate, but connected institutions together on an ongoing basis to share information and develop strategy. As trust is built and relationships solidify, institutions embark on a collaborative phase of working together to prototype projects supportive of their shared strategy. Successful execution of project-based work (with observable outcomes and progress) enables stakeholders to begin assessing their institutional role in replicating the success. This reflective process, both within institutions and within the collaborative, creates an opportunity for systems change. Through policy reform, accountability mechanisms, incentive structures, and resources, the collaborative is able to scale-up and institutionalize their prototypes.

For the past three years, the south Wood County area has worked to build capacity in the workforce system through a process of shared learning and relationship building.

KEY-FINDINGS: SHARED LEARNING AMONG STAKEHOLDERS

When Incentive began to promote workforce development as a community necessity, employers and donors knew little about the workforce system. Similarly, the public system understood little about employers' perspectives on training or the role of philanthropy. Before collaboration was possible, south Wood County had to develop a shared understanding of workforce development's potential for the community. And more importantly, community leaders needed time to learn about each other: their perspectives on workers, jobs, and organizational roles.

- **Leveraged Funding:** Focus group participants acknowledge having learned more about the benefits of philanthropic donations in leveraging and attracting public investment. Stakeholders also demonstrate greater awareness of the critical role public resources play in improving workforce outcomes, particularly in a rural community.
- **The Workforce System:** Workforce Central has improved stakeholder understanding of the "workforce system," its

mission, clients, resources, and constraints. Service providers have promoted the public system's role as worker advocate, educating employers and donors on the value of career pathways for multiple worker populations.

- **Key Workforce Central Principles:** Stakeholders exhibit consensus on the "Ultimate Outcome," "dual-customer" approach, and "training for jobs that exist." When asked about the importance of achieving dual-customer goals, all Funders Collaborative respondents⁸⁸ viewed increased employer access to workers, training opportunities, and worker supports as important (22 percent) or very important (78 percent) to achieving the "Ultimate Outcome."

Workforce Central's partners have begun to internalize key workforce concepts and best practices. Yet, the focus groups also revealed diverse perspectives on the long-term unemployed, employer engagement, and systems change.

- **Long-term Unemployed:** Service providers noted that the promise of these workers as a part of the local labor supply is often missed. Given the increasing numbers of long-term unemployed (>26 weeks),⁸⁹ the service providers expressed concern that marginalizing this population would impede Workforce Central's goal of moving local workers into local jobs. Service providers encouraged Workforce Central and its employer-partners to lead the way in viewing the long-term unemployed as a local resource capable of being re-skilled and transitioned into secure employment.
- **Employer Engagement:** Views of appropriate employer engagement varied by sector. Public-sector service providers appreciated employer participation in program design; however, they also expressed a need for business to "come onboard and say, we're behind this effort, we support this effort, in a more visible manner than they have."⁹⁰ Providers also encouraged greater exposure to, and recognition of, the challenges faced by dislocated and disadvantaged workers. In particular, the public sector advocated strongly for internship guarantees and hiring preferences for workers successfully completing the intensive Food Manufacturing Science program (20 credit hours over 22-34 weeks).

⁸⁸ COWS conducted a survey of Funders Collaborative members in June 2011. The survey had a response rate of 69.2 percent (nine out of 13).

⁸⁹ The standard Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit lasts for 26 weeks or approximately six months. The last recession witnessed a number of special state and federal extensions of these benefits. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) considers the "long-term unemployed" to include any person unemployed for 27 weeks or more, so long as the person has continued to actively search for work during this period. (See also www.bls.gov)

⁹⁰ Service Provider Focus Group

Private-sector CEOs sought more opportunities for engagement and greater participation by other businesses. The executives also noted that hiring commitments based on program completion run counter to established corporate policy and business practice.

“We have to interview no different and maybe their personality just doesn’t fit into our program. Again, they were qualified. We are happy with that. There is the personal dynamic that has to be thought through.”⁹¹

– Employer

“Our production manager goes out and they get about ten people, and they interview them all . . . we send them to an industrial psychologist in the area, and . . . out of that, we cull down. We’ve worked with this industrial psychologist, and we have indicated to him, ‘this is what we want to see in a person.’ This is the team. This is who we are. These are the things that we want to promote. Then we hire out of that cohort.

We haven’t started using people out of the course, but that’s what we would do in the future. But again, just because they’ve had the course far guarantees an opportunity, because they have to fit what you want in an employee.”⁹²

– Employer

Finally, donors viewed financial commitment by employers as critical to Workforce Central’s future. Long-term financial support by the business sector would send a strong signal about the importance of workforce development in the community.

- **Systems Change:** Systems-thinking is a pillar of Workforce Central’s strategy for revitalizing south Wood County. Creating interventions solely for individuals is insufficient; the community needs effective and efficient systems for workforce development. However, Workforce Central stakeholders hold very divergent ideas of what systems change should look like at an operational level. Employers generally view systems change as changes to the public sector, in particular how public institutions respond to the needs of industry (e.g., targeted training and improving the image of manufacturing among potential employees). Service providers also focus on the public system; however, they have yet to articulate plans for institutionalizing lessons learned from Workforce Central.

KEY FINDINGS: COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

In the first year of the initiative, one stakeholder described the baseline workforce development structure as:

“There are a lot of different players, but a fragmented approach, which is not necessarily well connected to employers in the community. The local workforce development board has a very large territory it’s responsible for, which is not necessarily developed around an economic region as it is an arbitrary geography.”⁹³

– Local Donor

Employers, service providers, and donors from the south Wood County area participate in Workforce Central. Partners with responsibility for a broader geographic area came to the table focused on the boundaries of this sub-county economic region. To enhance coordination, stakeholders are organized into a strategic governing body, three partnerships, and four workgroups. This structure is intended to effectively allocate funds for programs benefitting both workers and businesses. However, success has depended upon the active and trusted participation of key community leaders.

- **Growth Indicative of Collaboration Success:** During 2010 and 2011, Workforce Central added 14 investors to the Funders Collaborative and grew the Manufacturing Partnership to 11 employers. The Service Provider Network increased from 21 to 30 with more case managers participating. Finally, the CEO Peer Council added three members.

⁹¹ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation.*

- **Stakeholder Trust:** The collaborative effort began with natural skepticism on the part of the stakeholders. Philanthropy’s role was unknown and doubts existed concerning public-sector effectiveness and employer commitment. Related to the differences in perspective noted above, the stakeholders continue to express some skepticism.

“Employers have stepped up, but have not stepped up far enough. In terms of internships and hiring . . . we need to strengthen that piece. Participants also need to ramp up their commitment. A participant was offered an internship and they said, ‘No.’ Dual customer requires a higher level of commitment than through our regular programs and we are struggling.”⁹⁴

– Service Provider

“My general impression is that the workforce development community doesn’t really understand what we need. I don’t just need someone that shows up and can throw a bag twenty feet. They have to, when they walk into the building, they have to understand ‘lean,’ they have to understand how to read a regulation. And we want someone who will be engaged, who will participate, that they will be interactive with our management team. We want positive people.”⁹⁵

– Employer

Despite these lingering concerns, the level of stakeholder trust and commitment is strong. Focus group participants viewed the collaborative approach as not only promising, but essential to success.

“As a funder, coming from the private sector, it’s fundamental. We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t designed (as a collaborative). Because if it’s just the government model, let them fund it. We’re not going to try to change the world if they’re just going to go back and do the same thing.”⁹⁶

– Local Donor

From this foundation, the Workforce Central stakeholders have begun to develop a community-focused view of their roles, acknowledging the constraints facing each sector while leveraging their strengths. For example, employers and service providers independently acknowledged that both philanthropic and public-sector resources are critical. Private dollars, whether from employers or philanthropic donors, provide flexibility. Public dollars provide scale and a deep network of wrap-around worker supports.

Funders Collaborative members shared this sentiment with 100 percent of respondents identifying public-sector participation as important (22 percent) or very important (67 percent) to achieving Workforce Central’s goals.⁹⁷

- **Improved Communication Channels:** Regardless of the sector, Workforce Central stakeholders credited the collaborative model with opening up avenues of discussion that were previously closed. Improved communication has directly benefitted businesses and workers as evidenced by the:
 1. relevancy of Manufacturing Partnership training programs to job requirements,
 2. adjustments to course schedules to accommodate incumbent workers, and
 3. collaborative, multi-sector problem-solving to manage student and employer expectations of the nascent Food Science internship program.
- **Increased Employer-Tech College Collaboration:** Work to prototype training partnerships and programs has encouraged employers to better leverage the training resources of the local technical college. Employers lauded Mid-State Technical College responsiveness, and willingness to tailor programs based on industry needs. By working together on program design and delivery, employers and training providers gained an increased appreciation for their respective areas of expertise.

94 Service Provider Interview

95 CEO Peer Council Focus Group

96 Funders Collaborative Focus Group

97 Workforce Central Funders Collaborative Survey Summary

- **Notable Partnership with the Public Workforce System:** A mutual focus on community welfare rather than institutional credit has enabled Workforce Central and the local Workforce Development Board to achieve a uniquely collaborative, compatible, and effective partnership.

“I think sometimes you don’t realize how cool you are in terms of this community foundation’s desire to do this and, I mean 100 percent, I wish I could replicate it. I think there would be a natural ability to say, ‘Hey, we do workforce development.’ But when you look at the possibilities of joining forces, it’s a no-brainer about where you can go with it.”⁹⁸

– Public Workforce System Rep

THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY

This National Fund site adopts a unique approach to workforce partnerships with the philanthropic organization incubating a workforce intermediary. Community stakeholders identified the need for this approach stating,

“I believe a philanthropic organization, such as the Community Foundation, can play a critical role in bridging the cultural gap between the private sector and the public workforce system. The Community Foundation serves as a ‘think tank,’ facilitator, and evaluator of new, collaborative approaches to match the skill needs of employers with the skill sets of workers.”⁹⁹

Members of the Funders Collaborative and training partnerships viewed Workforce Central’s intermediary role as beneficial, even necessary, for success.

- **Incourage had the budgetary flexibility to devote resources to systems change.** Unlike the other Workforce Central stakeholders, Incourage could use its funding to hire and devote expert personnel to the time-intensive task of pursuing systems change through multi-sector collaborations. Neither the public workforce system nor employers could spare staff time to coordinate stakeholders, manage the development of training prototypes, or focus on systems reform.
- **Expert staff inspired confidence in the collaborative approach.** Jennifer Rigganbach brought extensive knowledge of the complicated practices and funding structures of the public workforce system, along with a passion for promoting the value of community-focused workforce development. John Bergin and Rick Merdan provided insider knowledge of, and connections to, the region’s manufacturing base. Their combined expertise and proactive attitude created a sense of confidence and capability among Workforce Central’s stakeholders. Trust and faith in Workforce Central has also translated into patience with the collaborative process – a willingness to stay at the table and work through challenges together.

Coordinated Activity

From a stronger position of workforce capacity and partner engagement, stakeholders looked to align public dollars, pool resources, and improve outcomes for the dual customer. Workforce Central focused first on the Manufacturing Partnership. Pathways and IT Occupational partnerships followed. Workforce Central’s stakeholders coordinated on a regular basis to develop and implement these programs.

⁹⁸ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

⁹⁹ Workforce Central Funders Collaborative Survey Summary

KEY FINDINGS: POOLED FUNDING

The Funders Collaborative was formed to pool and leverage the limited workforce development resources of this rural community. Although a vital source of support, public-sector investment is limited by restricted funds, complex bureaucratic processes, and severe budget reductions. To date, the Collaborative has pooled public, philanthropic, and employer contributions into a consolidated fund of over \$2,154,877 supporting employer engagement and training costs.

- **Offsetting Restricted Funds through a Multi-Sector Approach:** Workforce Central has effectively managed funding streams from public, private, and philanthropic investors. Only by leveraging and offsetting restricted funds could the initiative provide the wide array of services benefitting workers and businesses, such as its investment in incumbent worker training.
- **Local Donor Support for Workforce Development:** Using the philanthropic expertise and relationships of Incentive, the initiative has successfully convinced local donors to pool and leverage their resources for workforce development. Investing in the local workforce represented a significant departure from the traditional “bricks-and-mortar”-giving of south Wood County donors.
- **Flexible Funding:** The local technical college, workforce development board, and nonprofit service providers celebrate the availability of “flexible” philanthropic funding to support critical services for workers and businesses. Flexible dollars have funded: transportation vouchers and training materials, as well as research into skill gaps and job availability.
- **Financial Contributions from Local Businesses:** Publicly driven industry partnerships often have difficulty attracting funds directly from employers. Workforce Central has experienced some success attracting employer investments. The employers of the Manufacturing Partnership contributed \$22,443 towards the WAT match requirement, \$72,100 to support internship wages, and pooled funding totaling \$236,000. Funders Collaborative members ranked employer contributions as most critical with 78 percent of survey respondents identifying business/company funding as very important.¹⁰⁰
- **Challenges with Technical College Funding Systems:** Stakeholders identified the silos and funding mechanisms of post-secondary education as a serious challenge. Despite success pooling funds for the Manufacturing Partnership

and Pathways, technical college funding structures remain highly problematic for short-term, “in-and-out” training.

KEY FINDINGS: DUAL-CUSTOMER PROGRAMMING

A key requirement for Funders Collaborative investment is the capacity to improve outcomes for both businesses and workers. Workforce Central has made progress instilling a dual-customer focus into its work:

- **Co-Leadership Structure Gives Voice to Business and Worker Advocates:** The Funders Collaborative and the Manufacturing Partnership have a co-leadership structure with both employers and service providers influencing program investments and design. The CEOs signal training needs and industry forecasts, while service providers formalize and deliver training suited to business needs and tailored for workers.
 - **Multiple Worker Populations Served by Collaborative:** Workforce Central stakeholders targeted three populations of workers: disadvantaged (low-skilled, low-income) individuals, unemployed job seekers, and incumbent workers. Serving the dual customer was the motivation behind this strategy. By pursuing incumbent worker training, Workforce Central attracted employers to the effort. Active employer engagement consequently led to business investments, internship sites, and guidance on program design, all benefitting job seekers in the Food Manufacturing Science Certificate Program.
- Funders Collaborative members have also indicated strong support (100 percent of survey respondents)¹⁰¹ for engaging employers to both train incumbent workers and to guide training that leads to family-sustaining wages for job seekers. Notably, 66 percent of Collaborative respondents perceived economic and personal supports for dislocated workers as very important, as compared to 57 percent who considered access to training for family-sustaining employment very important.¹⁰²
- **Value-Added Services for Employers:** Through the Peer Council Facilitator, Workforce Central provides employers with technical assistance that improves training program design and worker outcomes. Technical assistance services include needs assessments, employer case studies, and worker training grants.

KEY FINDINGS: COMMON MEASUREMENT

Employers, agency leaders, and donors have all expressed the importance of demonstrating success both for Workforce Central's sustainability and for building community esteem. However, stakeholders are currently reticent to define success beyond the "Ultimate Outcome." Neither employers nor funders have defined specific metrics for progress.

- **Tracking Progress Through Efforts-to-Outcomes Data System:** In 2011, Workforce Central launched the development of a shared data tracking system. The Efforts-to-Outcomes (ETO) human services application will enable the initiative to track both outcome and progress measures.
- **Long-Range Focus Impeding Measurement:** Although donors and employers indicated the importance of positive, measurable outcomes, they felt that any attempt to measure "return-on-investment" at this juncture was premature. Nevertheless, Workforce Central staff are actively encouraging development of explicit and concrete metrics for both funders and employers.

Sustainability

The baseline evaluation for Workforce Central identified sustainability as an important issue. As a rural initiative, Workforce Central has a limited pool of resources from which to draw stakeholder, financial, and staff support. Three years later, confidence in the initiative has grown, as has concern about the capacity to sustain and advance the progress achieved.

KEY FINDINGS: STAKEHOLDER COMMITMENT

- **Sense of Ownership:** The stakeholders have come to appreciate the time, process, and investment required to simply lay the foundation for effective collaboration. In fact, participation in this pre-work helped solidify long-term partner engagement. Stakeholders expressed a sense of ownership in Workforce Central's future, holding themselves responsible for translating the pre-work into successful outcomes.
- **Philanthropy Necessary for Continued Employer Engagement:** Employers viewed continued multi-sector engagement as most critical to sustainability. Although capable of changing with continued positive exposure to the public system, several employer-partners indicated that their engagement would likely falter without philanthropy at the center of the effort – especially if driven solely by the public sector.

KEY FINDINGS: FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

In addition to continued stakeholder engagement, success hinges on the availability of funds and staff support. Stakeholders expressed concern that a loss of funding or key staff would slow momentum at this critical juncture: first year of training completed.

- **Financial Resources:** Full-cost recovery for courses and enhanced case management resulted in significant expense for the training partnerships. Similarly, Incourage devotes considerable staff time to stakeholder engagement and project administration.

"We had funding for this second round (of Food Manufacturing Science) training. If we do another round, where will the funding come from? The second round MSSC component is coming through the Industry Partnership Grant (WIA discretionary), but the rest is coming from the NCWWDB budget."¹⁰³

– Manufacturing Partnership Partner

“I think this model requires an extensive amount of time, commitment, and babysitting that the public system doesn’t have the resources for. If we are going to replicate it, we are going to have to streamline it.”¹⁰⁴

– Funders Collaborative Member

- **Critical Leadership:** Focus group participants acknowledged the time and expertise required to facilitate a successful training partnership.

“I would just mention leadership. I think that’s going to be a real challenge going forward. Unless you can clone Jen (Riggenbach), you’re ultimately going to need people who are going to support this project going forward, who can convey to the community the sense of confidence that we have. That’s going to be a real challenge to identify the right people to lead the project.”¹⁰⁵

– Employer-Donor

KEY FINDINGS: POLICY ADVOCACY

Public systems change is a new concept for private sector employers and donors. As described above, Workforce Central used the first two years of the initiative to increase understanding of the workforce system and system reform. This pre-work significantly improved the partners’ knowledge of: 1) benefits access, 2) their respective roles (as philanthropy, private industry, and public service provider), and 3) the uniqueness of their rural economy/labor market. This increased knowledge has led to a progression in thought about dislocated and long-term unemployed workers, the business challenges facing local industry, and the vital, yet fiscally-threatened, services of the public workforce system.

Although less tangible than community or institutional systems reform, this evolution in understanding is significant, particularly within a highly dynamic political climate. In addition to the uncertainty at the federal level, Wisconsin’s Department of Workforce Development changed leadership three times in 2011. Nevertheless, Workforce Central’s stakeholders have remained committed to their collaborative, community-focused model. A recent anecdote shared by the Peer Council Facilitator exemplifies the community’s movement towards systems reform:

A bi-partisan group of Workforce Central employers, service providers, and donors met with a federal legislator to advocate collectively for economic and workforce development resources. In the past, the public agencies and private employers would have vied for a separate Congressional visit to push their independent interests. Now, Workforce Central stakeholders think first about how they can work together in pursuit of objectives that benefit the community as a whole.

Additional, less abstract examples include:

- The Incourage CEO providing national leadership as a rural issue expert;
- Providing venues for coordinated activity that bypass artificial geographic, sector, and institutional boundaries;
- Local companies incorporating workforce development into the economic development strategy for the region;
- Service providers delivering enhanced, on-site case management services at the technical college (continuation dependent upon availability of staff resources);
- The public system advocating for revised state guidance to facilitate partnerships with philanthropy;¹⁰⁶
- Engaging in discussion of workforce program consolidation at the federal level.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Id.*

¹⁰⁵ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹⁰⁶ Service Provider Interviews

¹⁰⁷ Service Provider Interviews

KEY FINDINGS: JOBS

Despite ending 2011 with an unemployment rate of 6.4 percent, south Wood County continues to appeal for “jobs.” Workforce Central’s stakeholders share this desire, asserting the importance of economic development and job creation for the community’s economic health. South Wood County’s historic success as a “pulp and paper” economy created little need for economic development resources. The two principle employers developed the community and defined economic opportunity. As with workforce development, the transition from a single industry to a diversified economy exposed critical gaps in the region’s economic development infrastructure. Downsizing and reorganization depleted the community’s leadership and innovation base.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the area lacked a strategic vision and plan for attracting or growing business. Workforce development can prepare residents for a diversified economy; however, the role of creating jobs lies elsewhere. The region needs a vibrant, innovative economic development network to set and execute a vision for revitalizing the business sector and creating jobs.

- **Workforce Central Role in Economic Development:** According to one member of the Funders Collaborative,

“(W)hile it is not a stated goal of the project, a desired outcome of the work is job creation through organic growth of existing employers or attraction of new jobs related to existing industry or recruitment of new employers.”¹⁰⁹

Two-thirds of Collaborative survey respondents agreed, expressing a desire to strengthen the linkages between local economic development, job creation, and workforce development groups.¹¹⁰

- **Role of Funders Collaborative:** To grow local economic development capacity, the Funders Collaborative replicated its approach to workforce development, concentrating first on community knowledge and discussion. In April 2011, the Funders Collaborative allocated \$24,000 for FutureWorks¹¹¹ to develop the “Roadmap for Economic Growth”, an analysis of the region’s economic development assets and their link to Workforce Central. The resulting recommendations mirror Workforce Central’s approach to workforce development:
 - Start with manufacturing.
 - Form an intermediary organization to develop and implement a tightly focused plan.
 - Hire a highly skilled and experienced economic development professional.
 - Organize a coalition of key stakeholders.¹¹²
- **Role of Workforce Central Employer-Partners:** The most mature partnership, Manufacturing, has begun to identify appropriate economic development roles and activities for participants. Members of the CEO Peer Council intend to complete a formal strategic planning process in 2012 that will include economic development and job creation.

“One of the challenges is that we have to develop positions for these people and we have to also develop positions for people to move up within their own company. The career ladder, that’s a concern. It’s not insurmountable. But there’s a lot to that . . . the economic development piece has to happen.” – Employer-Donor

¹⁰⁸ “In south Wood County’s past, economic development was not just finding places to work, it (was) also developing capacities and opportunities here, that you have market opportunity to grow your business ability to pay higher than the prevailing rates, so you can attract the best employees and continue that cycle. We lost that when a lot of the local ownership and some of the management moved away. We lost a little bit of that focus. So the virtuous cycle broke down.” – Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹⁰⁹ Workforce Central Funders Collaborative Survey Summary

¹¹⁰ Workforce Central Funders Collaborative Survey Summary

¹¹¹ FutureWorks LLC is a consultancy focused on sustainable regional economic development.

¹¹² FutureWorks, 2011. *Roadmap for Economic Growth*.

LESSONS LEARNED AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

“Systems Change,” while a central tenet of this work and extremely important, runs the danger of serving simply as an overarching trope without consensus on its definition, goals, and achievable outcomes. The Workforce Central stakeholders have invested considerable time identifying and defining the work of the initiative, as reflected by its “Ultimate Outcome”. However, as noted above, considerable differences remain regarding long-term institutional roles, change strategies, and measures of progress.

Systems change at the project/program-level appears most achievable in the short-term as evidenced by the modest progress achieved through the Manufacturing and Pathways partnership programs. Systems change at the institutional level will require more time, trust-building, and collaborative work.

Having completed its first year of training, Workforce Central is well positioned to begin a strategic planning process with its stakeholders. Strategic planning should be used for in-depth discussion and consensus-building on how systems change looks, how institutions effectuate that change, and how it is measured. Unanimous agreement on every objective is neither likely, nor necessary. Rather, a multi-sector framework for achieving, and working from, consensus will further progress on systems change. Stakeholders can identify the parts of the system affected, progress measures, and a time period for achieving incremental reforms. Workforce Central can work towards consensus and ownership among the affected stakeholders as a start. This process has the potential to re-invigorate stakeholder engagement after a year focused on program implementation.

Systems Change

IDENTIFY OBJECTIVES FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Progress is measured from a shared starting point. To further the goal of systems change, Workforce Central can begin the process of identifying, and eliciting ownership, of specific objectives for reform. For example, the following objectives require collaborative problem-solving and action to move the community closer to its economic goals:

Plan for partnership sustainability. The extensive resources committed to the “care and feeding” of industry partnerships threaten Workforce Central’s capacity to serve these larger systems functions. As noted above, Workforce Central has assumed responsibility for partnership recruitment and engagement, meeting coordination, and logistics. To ensure that philanthropically-funded time and expertise are appropriately used to advance systems reform, the stakeholders need a long-term sustainability plan for the partnerships. Strategic issues requiring resolution include:

1. What type of entity is best suited to assume responsibility for the partnerships?
2. What resources will this entity need to succeed?
3. What steps must be taken and how much time allotted to effectively transition responsibility for the partnerships to another entity?

As a result of the trust held for Workforce Central, a plan to transition partnership tasks to another organization must engage stakeholders from all sectors. One private-sector stakeholder has noted:

“In some communities, it may not be the community foundation. In this town, right now, it does. Absolutely critical – has to be the community foundation. But could it be something else down the road that has the same influence and same resources? Possibly. One hundred miles down the road, could it be different – the Chamber? Absolutely. But for (now) it absolutely has to be this.”¹³

– Employer

This perspective was expressed by many focus group participants, from donors to employers to public service providers. Through sustainability planning for the partnerships, Workforce Central has an opportunity to build capacity, including community trust, in other local organizations.

Establish effective funding mechanisms for industry-responsive training models. As witnessed in the first year of training, regulatory and funding constraints can impede the use of industry-responsive training models. Through multi-sector discussion and planning, Workforce Central's stakeholders can begin to develop solutions that secure both the future of the training programs and their unique level of industry engagement and responsiveness.

"Something that Workforce Central has no control over and neither really does the National Fund, but the model of their career pathway and the just-in-time training and (chunkable) courses, that's not something that any institution of higher education is really structured to deliver and part of that is because the Department of Education doesn't recognize and (provide) financial aid for that type of approach. The National Fund may be able to influence . . . the Department of Labor and Department of Education."

– Technical College Representative

Re-integrate the long-term unemployed into the workforce. The challenge of re-integrating the long-term unemployed back into the workforce is not an issue unique to south Wood County. Yet, the high levels of engagement, community commitment, and collaboration demonstrated by Workforce Central's stakeholders create a unique foundation for shifting the paradigm and perception of this population. Collaborative problem solving can lead to a greater appreciation of the assets held by these workers, and to multi-sector strategies engaging the community in the reintegration process. Private-sector engagement is critical in this process, as long durations of unemployment significantly reduce future employment opportunities. The public system understands transitional training and support. The private sector has the jobs. Philanthropy has the respect of the community. Pooling this expertise could result in an innovative model for reintegrating the long-term unemployed.

Incentivize industry-recognized training. Workforce Central has experienced an unexpected challenge with its training programs: limited interest. Despite economic conditions and increased job competitiveness, recruiting workers for advanced training has proven difficult. The lack of obvious and strong incentives for successfully completing the training may explain some of the recruitment/attrition problems. A question is raised for Workforce Central's stakeholders: Does participation in the training programs, in fact, increase a person's likelihood of being employed? What is the "return-on-investment" for the worker? Can employment in the manufacturing industry be viewed as an asset for the worker, and the community?

A spectrum of solutions exists – each option having the potential to shift a worker's mindset towards appreciation and acceptance of the need for industry-recognized training.

1. Employer participation in developing an interest in manufacturing jobs among current and future workers (e.g., the K-12 system).
2. Shared participation (employers, instructors, and case managers) in setting worker expectations for the hiring process and work requirements through a consistent, and often-repeated, message.
3. Employer participation in the training and internship selection process, increasing the likelihood that a person will satisfy hiring requirements.

"One of the suggestions that I would have is for our HR staff (to become) engaged. 'Bring me 100 people and we'll pick the 20 that we think will be successful.' That's what they do for a living. Not just a worker who wants a job, but a worker who wants a job in a 365 day, 24/7 (business). You'll work nights. You'll work weekends. You'll be on call. That's the nature of the business that we're in."¹⁴

– Employer

4. Employers select and engage trainees as interns at the start of training with the 72-hour internship and possible hiring preference contingent upon successful completion of course requirements.
5. A memorandum of understanding is established with employers committing to a minimum number of paid internships for people successfully graduating from a relevant Workforce Central training program.
6. A documented level of hiring preference is provided to workers with industry-recognized credentials obtained through the Workforce Central programs (e.g., MSSC and FMSC).
7. Internship and/or hiring commitments for workers successfully completing program requirements.

It deserves repeating that these ideas fall across a spectrum of “incentives.” The options differ in the distribution of stakeholder investment and risk. A multi-sector strategic planning process will enable stakeholders to weigh and select options for prototyping.

CONTINUE MULTI-SECTOR POLICY ADVOCACY

Workforce Central stakeholders view education and advocacy as part of their role. In 2011, the stakeholders participated in numerous public education and outreach events. These events are notable for being multi-sector, with public, private, and philanthropic representatives carrying a shared community-focused message. State and federal redistricting will provide Workforce Central with an opportunity to expose more public representatives to its work. Seven state legislators and a new Congressional representative will cover portions of Wood County.

Anticipated changes in workforce funding and policy at the state and federal levels make policy advocacy critical. Public funding is being scaled back as workforce development needs are increasing. Wisconsin’s workforce development system is in a more precarious position than some other states, as federal funding is allocated based upon the state’s relative share of unemployment.¹¹⁵ Wisconsin also makes no additional investment of state funds. Current proposals for workforce reform would give more power to the state over identifying and funding successful programs from its federal allotment.

The south Wood County area will compete against regions with greater economic need and more people facing unemployment. Workforce Central’s multi-sector contingent will need to advocate for its community and its training models as best practices worthy of continued public support. In addition to funding, Workforce Central has an equally important opportunity to advocate for policy changes that facilitate taking its models to scale.

Pooled Funding

USE PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FOR SYSTEMS REFORM

Philanthropy is often championed for its flexible, and at times extensive, funding sources. During the first year of training, philanthropy served the common role of paying for services and materials not covered by the public system. However, these investments were less than \$70,000. In comparison, Incourage devoted \$325,000 to incubate Workforce Central as a reform-focused intermediary. As repeatedly emphasized by Workforce Central’s Project Director, the collaboration served to pilot programs that “go beyond interventions on behalf of individuals . . . to change the system in key ways.”¹¹⁶

South Wood County’s use of philanthropic funding to work on systems change through strong, multi-sector collaborations is a replicable lesson learned. As noted by a public-sector stakeholder,

¹¹⁵ United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser Statutory Formulas for State Allotments. TEGL 13-08, Attachment 1. Available at: wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL/TEGL13-08a1.pdf

¹¹⁶ Yellow Wood Associates, 2009. *Workforce Central Phase One Evaluation*.

“What really makes this system work is that we have the Community Foundation because it has enormous amounts of talent, community talent, money, and flexibility that the public system doesn’t have. And, I just can’t imagine a time when the public system has that kind of flexibility. So the public system may need you forever, (that) is my fear.”¹¹⁷

Workforce partnerships would benefit from viewing philanthropic resources as more than “flexible funding” for materials and enhanced support services not covered by restricted funds. Rather, philanthropic funds can serve a unique and critical role of enabling the many tasks necessary to change the way the workforce system functions (e.g., stakeholder engagement, knowledge transfer, prototype development, convening, and advocacy).

POOLING RESOURCES—A NECESSITY FOR RURAL AREAS

The south Wood County area has just over 43,000 residents across 823 square miles. Four of the members of the CEO Peer Council account for an estimated 45 percent¹¹⁸ of the area’s utility usage and a significant portion of the anticipated job growth. The whole North Central Workforce Development Board area (nine counties including Wood County) has job projections of 610 new jobs and 4,850 replacement jobs annually through 2018.¹¹⁹

The region is served by one primary workforce training provider — Mid-State Technical College. In encourage, and a handful of other philanthropic and nonprofit organizations complete the network of local resources.

These organizations share a small pool of local leaders for funding and service. Only by pooling resources could the community make concrete steps toward revitalizing the economy. Workforce Central’s prototype programs have shown initial promise in improving outcomes for businesses and workers. However, as public budgets become more constrained, the need for collaboration increases. Strategic planning at the collaborative level is needed to advance Workforce Central’s current and future programming given these constraints.

“I’ve heard it a couple of times at different meetings from people who were new to our community saying, ‘there is something different here,’ and I think it’s that willingness for people to at least come together and try to see what they can do about it. People look at the resources that they have and see if they can help.”¹²⁰

— Local Donor

Economic Development and Job Creation

LEVERAGE INVESTMENT IN FUTUREWORKS’ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP

As a small, rural region, south Wood County’s future depends upon having local, family-sustaining jobs with career potential. Workforce Central’s investment in FutureWorks represented a first step in building a robust economic development infrastructure. As the region begins to work on the FutureWorks recommendations, Workforce Central can advance progress by sharing lessons learned, relationships, and resources. Most notably, Workforce Central brings its experience viewing workforce development through an economic development lens to drive strategic community investments. By actively participating in the implementation of FutureWorks, Workforce Central and its stakeholders can help create an economic development infrastructure reflective of, and linked to, the broader goals of the community including the “Ultimate Outcome.”

¹¹⁷ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

¹¹⁸ CEO Peer Council Funders Group

¹¹⁹ Office of Economic Advisors, North Central Wisconsin Employment Projections, Long Term Projections (2008-2018), Occupational Projections Table. Available at: dwd.wisconsin.gov/oea/employment_projections/north_central/lt_nc_occ.xls

¹²⁰ Funders Collaborative Focus Group

SUPPORT THE CREATION OF LOCAL FAMILY-SUSTAINING JOBS

To be economically vibrant, the region must increase the availability of jobs offering family-sustaining wages and career advancement. The paper industry once provided year-round jobs supporting a middle-class lifestyle and a healthy local economy. In contrast, many of Workforce Central's employer-partners operate in seasonal industries. Food processing and packaging rely on temporary workers and have limited full-time positions. Some, but not all, seasonal positions pay a family-sustaining wage of \$21.86 per hour¹²¹ or more. Given employer preference for "growing their own," strong performance as a seasonal worker can lead to permanent, full-time employment with a career track.

Yet, absent opportunities for year-round work that will sustain a family, residents will continue to experience economic pressure and/or leave the region. A depressed local economy will also impede business's ability to attract qualified workers and remain competitive.

Workforce Central's employer-partners have expressed a need to make quality jobs available year-round. The CEO Peer Council has discussed several ideas, such as attracting seasonal employers with complementary hiring schedules thereby allowing workers to move from one full-time position to the next with limited wage interruption. Employer-partners have a unique opportunity to positively influence standards for attracting businesses to the region. In particular, community stakeholders should consider economic distinctions (e.g., job security, health care coverage, and retirement benefits) between limited term and permanent jobs when advancing strategies to increase year-round employment. Employers can be persuasive messengers for the community goal of an economy built on family-sustaining jobs.

CONTINUE "TRAINING WORKERS FOR JOBS THAT EXIST"

Workforce training programs routinely fail to align the delivery of qualified workers with employers' job openings. A frustrating dynamic results: Employers must look outside the region for qualified workers to fill immediate openings, whereas workers who later gain their qualifications are forced to leave the region for employment because job vacancies have been filled. Workforce Central successfully navigated this challenge through its adherence to "training workers for jobs that exist." This strategy relied upon close, at times day-to-day, coordination with large, local employers. Mid-State Technical College played an equally important role in Workforce Central's success, delivering trained workers on time for planned openings. Mid-State re-designed curricula and scheduled courses with a goal of aligning completion dates to job application periods. Enhanced case management by the public workforce system helped dislocated and low-skilled workers complete the accelerated coursework. As of November 30, 2011, twelve (12) Food Manufacturing Science and 32 Pathways training participants acquired local employment subsequent to program completion.

While effective at moving job seekers into employment, this strategy is equally effective at helping incumbent workers advance into positions "that exist." To date, all participating businesses have filled their supervisory positions solely from the pool of Manufacturing Leadership Program trainees.¹²²

Workforce Central's continued success aligning workers with available jobs will require concerted stakeholder effort. Workforce Central can improve the efficiency of the training programs by working with the partners to address concerns about resource levels. Having progressed through the implementation phase, the partners can analyze features of the program that facilitated on-time delivery. Collaborative problem solving may reveal opportunities to streamline and reduce costs.

¹²¹ The wage of \$14.56 per hour is at the 50th percentile for annual job openings in south Wood County. Workforce Central encourages employers to meet the "Wages Needed to Pay for Basic Needs" as outlined in their economic report, *Vital Signs: Measuring the Vitality of South Wood County*. Available at: www.cfswc.org/page10005202.cfm. However, according to the Wood County Homeless Initiative Committee, \$14.56 does not meet the basic needs for a family of two adults and two children (requiring a 40 hour/week wage rate of \$21.86) (2010).

¹²² The Manufacturing Leadership Program is designed to build a pipeline of workers for future supervisory positions.

Stakeholder Engagement

LEVERAGE EARLY WINS TO RECRUIT EMPLOYERS AND DONORS

Having progressed from “talk” to action with observable outcomes, Workforce Central can leverage its achievements to attract additional stakeholders. One new donor acknowledged the Initiative’s progress stating, “Since they’ve made such good progress and we hadn’t hung around for it, we decided to give a gift and see what they’re doing and learn from the kind of work they’ve put forward. I think it’s good for the community.”¹²³

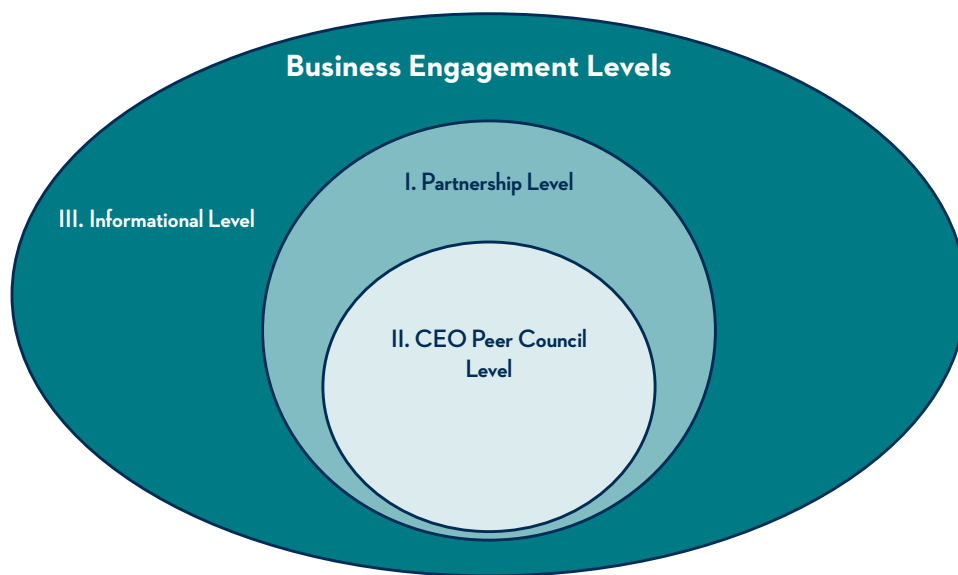
The willingness of donors to provide significant financial resources should not be underestimated. One employer-donor advised:

“I asked around the room and said, ‘What are you putting in?’ And, nobody told me. So, I put in a value. Then we had a budget meeting, and I said, ‘I would have gone (to that investment level) if I’d known that’s where everybody was.’”¹²⁴

Similar to public sector advocacy, a multi-sector message relating the necessity and impact of philanthropic support holds promise for attracting national, as well as local, donors.

Workforce Central’s employer-partners are also enthused about this opportunity for recruitment. Employers have noted a need for thoughtful, managed growth. Workforce Central has shared similar concerns about maintaining the CEO Peer Council’s integrity. The following graphic reflects a three-pronged strategy of employer engagement that Workforce Central plans to continue.

Workforce Central’s Manufacturing Partnership engages employers at three levels: 1) CEO Peer Council members provide financial resources and actively participate in training program design; 2) Employer-Partners participate by hiring workers and interns; 3) Interested Employers receive information on the partnership and participate in educational and outreach sessions.



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124 CEO Peer Council Focus Group

ADVANCE EXECUTIVE-LEVEL EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Many workforce-employer partnerships engage mid-level management or non-operational executives (e.g., Vice President of Human Resources). Lacking operational authority, these employer-representatives are unable to move the initiative from the table, but must seek company approval. Yet, the benefits of executive engagement come with availability and scheduling challenges.

Each of the Peer Council members has executive-level responsibility for a local production facility. Some members also have significant corporate obligations at a national or international level. As described by one Peer Council member,

“We’ve got two hours. We manage the time within the meeting and (Encourage and Workforce Central staff) do the heavy-lifting in between meetings. We don’t. And, if we were asked to, we would slowly fade away. Let Kelly and those guys do their job. Because that’s their core focus—whereas our core focus is managing the sites that we manage.”¹²⁵

Despite constraints on their time, Peer Council members expressed a desire to expand, not limit, their participation. To take advantage of this rare level of employer commitment, Workforce Central will need to address challenges with executive availability. For example, Workforce Central may need to supplement in-person meetings with web-based meetings or conference calls. Peer Council members value the dynamic of collaborating around a shared table. Workforce Central’s willingness to allow confidential conversation on topics of interest to the executives has created value for Peer Council members. Therefore, Workforce Central should work with executives to develop a schedule of meetings that maximizes opportunities for secure, personal interaction.

IDENTIFY AND TRACK INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED OUTCOME MEASURES

Employer participation in workforce partnerships often falters due to a lack of measurable outcomes. Justifiably, employers want proof that their investment of time and funds achieved positive business outcomes. The public system has been equally justified in stressing the long-term, often intangible benefits associated with workforce investments. Workforce professionals have attempted to navigate this conflict by proposing numerous

business outcome and return-on-investment (ROI) measures.¹²⁶ Notably, one Workforce Central partner described their ability to assess program value as,

“We’ve taken good advantage of the program and have promoted (participants) so we can report out . . . we’ve had successes. We’ve had people make a lot more money because (of the training). We can show the metrics of productivity and cost per pound and some of those things where we think (that), since the program started to today, some of those things would have occurred naturally, but it would have been a lot harder.”¹²⁷

Thus, Workforce Central has an opportunity to utilize its trusted relationships with local employer and service provider executives to identify and track outcome and ROI measures that have meaning in a business context and are achievable through workforce programs.

ENGAGE EMPLOYERS IN PATHWAYS TO CONNECT THE DISADVANTAGED TO FAMILY-SUSTAINING JOBS

Employer engagement with the Pathways program was limited. Peer Council members noted the importance of transitioning disadvantaged workers into family-sustaining jobs. They also identified ideas for increased Peer Council engagement:¹²⁸

- Advising service providers on the characteristics of model candidates for local jobs, including soft skills.

“I don’t recall any of us sitting down and talking about the model candidate or the model employee or what we are really looking for when we hire. And, can they check it off and say ‘Yeah, well this is really covered in this part of the curriculum.’”¹²⁹

– Employer

¹²⁶ Workforce programs not only impact workers and employers, but also the broader community. As a result, stakeholders should use a variety of metrics to assess progress and outcomes. In 2005, the National Governors Association for Best Practices with support from U.S. Department of Labor studied the utility of workforce metrics in six states (Florida, Michigan, Montana, Oregon, Texas, and Washington). Based upon this review, the following metrics were recommended as addressing progress from the worker, employer, and system perspective: 1) short- and long-term employment rates, 2) earnings levels, including average earnings change over time, 3) credential completion rates, 4) repeat employer customer rate, 5) employer market penetration, 6) participant return-on-investment and 7) taxpayer return-on-investment. The latter metric seeks to identify the community benefit of workforce programming through increased tax revenue and decreased social welfare payments.

Wilson. 2005. *Integrated Performance Information for Workforce Development: A Blueprint for States*. Available at: www.wtb.wa.gov/Documents/IPI.pdf

¹²⁷ CEO Peer Council Focus Group

¹²⁸ Examples provided during the CEO Peer Council Focus Group.

¹²⁹ *Id.*

- Communicating Workforce Central's successes to the community and beyond.
- Participating in efforts to change the perception of manufacturing.

Workforce Central can manage this interest in disadvantaged worker programming to make appropriate use of the Peer Council's expertise and time. For example, a discussion about career ladders and bridge programming could inspire recommendations on how to prepare disadvantaged workers for food processing jobs.

The Pathways Gerontology Program successfully engaged employers to provide work experience opportunities for participants. Participants successfully moved from work experience to permanent jobs. Workforce Central can also build off this success to engage health care employers in strategy discussions. The Social Innovation Fund proposal included health care as a targeted industry. Pathways provides an opportunity for more in depth health care sector work.

RE-ENGAGE EXECUTIVE-LEVEL SERVICE PROVIDERS

The Service Provider Network began as a venue for executive-level service providers to develop strategy. After creating a plan for dislocated and disadvantaged workers, executives stopped participating. The Service Provider Network became a venue for mid-level managers and case management professionals to share information and coordinate logistics while implementing the strategic plan.

Although some coordination of direct services will be needed for future participants, the level will likely decrease as programs become institutionalized. In contrast, public funding challenges will create a need for strategic discussions about support services and programming. For example, service providers may need to address the allocation of resources for dislocated workers compared to disadvantaged individuals. The CEO Peer Council lesson is that these high-level discussions are most effective when executives with decision-making authority are at the table. Workforce Central has an opportunity to reassess the role of the Service Provider Network and re-engage service provider executives.

“I think the ultimate goal at the end of the day would be: (south Wood County) recognized as a community that has resources, a community that is trying to do something . . . trying to be diversified, that is available and open to different businesses. The promise I see of the future is the opportunities here.”

– Service Provider