



Best Practice: Workforce I Career Center System

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CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREA: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

BEST PRACTICE

The **Workforce I Career Center (WFICC) system** within the New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS) is an integrated network of 8 Career Centers whose mission is to fulfill business customers' hiring and training needs by preparing and placing the most qualified individuals in their job opportunities. The Career Centers work with employers in high growth and demand industries and places 20,000 individuals in jobs annually. The Career Centers work closely with NYC Business Solutions Centers, which seeks to help businesses open, operate and expand. The NYC Business Solutions Centers collaborate with Career Centers to fill job opportunities that their business customers require.

ISSUE

The Workforce I Career Center system addresses the needs of New York City (NYC) businesses to have access to screened and qualified labor; and jobseekers' needs to have access to skills development and job opportunities citywide. The Workforce I Career Center system offers its services free of charge and open to any business or jobseeker needing assistance.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Workforce I Career Centers are to serve the needs of jobseekers and businesses using a demand driven workforce strategy that works closely with businesses to understand the skills and experience required to make a strong employment match. The key metrics used to measure success include: job placement, number of participants completing skills training, recruit to hire ratios, and percentage of job orders that are filled. Process and outcome measures are managed on a regular basis by program management staff to ensure that the quality and quantity of services delivered to our jobseeker and business customers meet the goals of the system.

To serve New Yorkers across the City, the Workforce I Career Center's are located throughout the five boroughs, and are designed to be demand driven, connecting the City's employers to the skilled workforce they need, and provide New York's adult jobseekers with job preparation and placement services. This suite of jobseeker services includes career advisement, job search counseling, skills training, and job placement assistance. Employers receive support from the portfolio of NYC Business Solutions services, which includes access to qualified job candidates, candidate matching and recruitment, customized job training, and post-employment assistance. Each WFICC is operated by a contracted service provider, which varies by site and include both non-profit, for-profit, and educational (community college) organizations.

IMPLEMENTATION

To increase communication, accountability and flexibility, SBS manages the performance of the Workforce I Career Center system for businesses and jobseeker metrics on a real time basis. The main funding source for the system is the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), funded through the US Department of Labor. While WIA has basic common measures that must be met, SBS has focused on the measurements it considers the most important, believing that if these outcomes are achieved, WIA common measures will be accomplished along the way.

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Under SBS' system of management, three strategies are utilized to measure success:

1. Performance-based milestones: These metrics are directly linked to the payment of service.
2. Strategic Operating Plans (SOPs): These objectives are not tied to payment, but instead are linked to the vendor's annual contract evaluation, and allow SBS to coordinate the system across vendors. In these plans, service providers articulate a strategy for their services in the year ahead, focused on key objectives laid out by SBS including, target sectors, hiring services, NYC Business Solutions Centers, Community Partners, and Training. Performance in these five areas is reviewed and rated on a quarterly basis, with monthly and quarterly meetings to discuss outcomes to date, current practices, and best practices. The SOPs are not only rewritten yearly, but also function as living documents, with metrics and procedures changing throughout the year in response to new learning. This allows for the constant incorporation of improvements, as well as collaboration between SBS and service providers around problem-solving and best practices. Through the SOPs, factors such as job placement wages, the efficiency of candidate matching, and the degree to which the system is driven by business needs can be incorporated into what it means to be a "successful" Career Center.
3. Other performance outcomes: These metrics can be used to assess and improve performance, but are not directly used in service provider evaluation. Another key to strong implementation is the ability for the Workforce I Career Centers to track customer data and have technology that enables smooth service delivery. The award winning central database – Worksource I – is used to track outcomes for these metrics, and this database is shared by SBS and all eight Workforce I Career Centers. Worksource I allows for the sharing of customer information across all Workforce I Career Center locations, enabling Center staff to better understand customer needs and provide better service. The application includes case management and assessment tools, along with management reporting capabilities. Most importantly, the system has streamlined workflow in the Centers, reducing the time it takes to perform data entry on information such as case notes, services consumed, job placements, and retention activities. Weekly, Monthly, and Quarterly performance management reports provide a window into real-time system performance, which informs programmatic decision making. This multi-layered system of outcome-based management allows SBS to keep centers accountable for performance, in addition to identifying and implementing best practices for operation.

COST

The current system consists of eight Career Centers, with annual operating budgets between \$1 and \$2.5 million per year. The total annual system budget which includes an additional \$20mm in training is nearly \$50mm.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The success of the system to date can be attributed to increased accountability and using a data driven approach to managing performance and making programmatic decisions. As such, the system is constantly challenged and challenging itself to improve performance. The staff time and commitment to performance management requires considerable management attention, however the results prove the value of the model- when SBS took over the system in 2004 only 500 placements were made annually; today over 20,000 placements will be made in 2009. While technology and strong reporting can alleviate some administrative burden, SBS and service provider staff must both be willing to actively collaborate and dedicate significant effort to this endeavor.

Although this management system requires a large investment, it also is a great strength of the NYC system. The NYC adult public workforce system consistently places New Yorkers in over 4,800 jobs each quarter. There are 100,000 New Yorkers using the system a year. To manage this volume of customers, and ensure high quality engagement while meeting outcomes, a strong data collection and performance evaluation system must be in place. SBS' system of performance-based contracts,



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SOPs, vendor communication, and performance reports provides this structure, allowing the Workforce I system to operate at scale.

TIMELINE

The Workforce I Career Centers are managed on a yearly calendar cycle for planning, budget and performance outcomes. Contracts are negotiated for 3 year cycles per each vendor partner.

LEGISLATION

The federal legislation governing the system is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which has been in existence in its current form since 1998. Most recently in February 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was passed, more commonly known as the "Federal Stimulus Package" which included additional WIA funding to the local system. This funding has allowed for more flexibility for training related investments and it being piloted for future versions of the WIA legislation.

LESSONS LEARNED

Key Takeaways

NYC has found that by holding the "contracted vendors" to a high standard, and focusing on performance that is important to the system, a more sustainable workforce development system that that focuses on business demand and meets local needs is created. The key takeaways from NYC's system that are applicable to other localities include:

1. Performance-based contracts, linking payment to accounts, enables SBS to hold vendors accountable for their performance on critical outcomes.
2. Strategic Operating plans enable SBS to manage to system-wide goals. Similarly, SOPs provide a platform for SBS and vendors to constantly evaluate performance and adjust accordingly, along with the ability to efficiently reallocate resources, is particularly useful during periods of economic downturn. Also, allowing the vendors to develop, evaluate and establish their path to success through the SOP process and focusing on metrics including business outcomes has proven critical for creating a sustainable system.
3. Finally, using a local system of record, like Worksource I allows the vendors to communicate and coordinate across the system, as well as allows SBS to manage performance in real time. Likewise, using the data available under this system, service providers are also able to tell their system's story and to prove the success of their practices, abilities which are crucial for gaining further support for their programs.

TRANSFERABILITY

The Workforce I Career Center system has various components that can be transferred and/or adopted by other localities. Below are several programs or initiatives that have wider reaching appeal outside of New York City.

Individual Training Grants

The Workforce I Career Centers issue Individual Training Grant vouchers of up to \$3,800 to jobseekers who are interested in developing occupational skills necessary to achieve their career goals. These vouchers are targeted towards training in high-growth industries, and they can be used to pay for tuition, processing fees, software, uniforms, registration fees, testing fees, tools, and books. The Workforce I Career Centers will issue nearly \$10 million in grants this year. In order to increase the transparency and ability of customers to seek out high-quality training providers, the NYC Department of Small Business



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Services launch the **NYC Training Guide**. The NYC Training Guide is a research tool that matches jobseekers with appropriate training programs to promote skills development and career advancement. Available at www.nyc.gov/trainingguide, this tool provides detailed information about training courses and providers, enabling jobseekers that receive Individual Training Grants to fully consider their training options and decide which course best meets their needs.

Career Advancement Program (CAP)

As a part of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), the Career Advancement Program has been launched in four Workforce I Career Centers to provide employed workers with additional services that promote retention, career advancement, and increased earnings. This program targets individuals employed consistently over the past 6 months and earning \$14 an hour or less. Each customer enrolled in CAP receives intensive career coaching and planning services, along with access to income and asset-building workshops, adult education classes, skills training, and connection to work supports. These advancement programs are located in the Upper Manhattan, Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn Workforce I Career Centers.

Sector-Based Career Centers

The New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS) launched its first Sector-Based Career Center, The Workforce I NYC Transportation Center, in June 2008 with a focus on the Transportation sector. This Center is operated by DB Grant Associates and is located in Jamaica, Queens. One of the first large-scale sector initiatives in NYC and the nation, the Workforce I NYC Transportation Center focuses specifically on four subsectors; Air Transportation, Truck Transportation, Passenger and Ground Transit, and Air Support Transportation. Recognizing the success of the sector-based initiative, the best practices of the Center will be applied to two new SBS Sector Centers, set to launch in the near future in partnership with the Mayor's Center for Economic Opportunity. The goals of the Centers are to: Identify and meet the needs of employers within the target sector, and provide low-income workers access to good jobs with career advancement opportunities.

Providing Labor Market Information

The New York City Labor Market Information Service (NYCLMIS) provides labor market analysis for the public workforce system. The service is a joint endeavor of the New York City Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the Center for Urban Research at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The NYCLMIS' objectives are to: Develop action-oriented research and information tools that will be used by workforce development service providers and policy makers to improve their practice, and be the portal for cutting-edge and timely labor market data about New York City. Over the last year, the NYCLMIS has produced two key reports and corresponding tools to assist the NYC workforce community in their business development practices. www.nyc.gov/wib and www.urbanresearch.org

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