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Coordination

N.Y. PROJECT YIELDS TO-DO TRILOGY TO CAREER TRACK

Create a “system” rather than a program, do it as part of a large collaborative, but make sure there’s one convening partner. These are three main lessons from the New York City Information Technology Career Ladders Consortium, according to Julian Alssid, executive director of the Workforce Strategy Center, one of the partners.

The project, which was cobbled together by a group of government agencies, philanthropies, employers and service providers, placed 200 city residents over three years in career-track jobs with a starting pay averaging close to \$12 an hour. Conceived in late 2000, when the economy was still booming and federal surpluses were projected as far as the eye could see, the collaborative had to cope with the collapse of the technology bubble (what they describe as the “Dot-bomb”) and the slump that followed the September 11 attack in the city.

Participants took a 12-week class in either office computing or toward A-Plus technician certification at the community college partner, which had designed the courses. Clients were referred to training and assigned a case manager at the community-based nonprofit with which they were working. Case managers attended the consortium’s classes and in this way became aware of attendance problems. They intervened with services. Once graduated, clients were referred to placement.

According to a project report, a career ladder emerged and, for the first time, linked entry-level training and funding with intermediate-level training and skill upgrades for incumbent workers. At this writing only three participants have moved from entry-level training to intermediate.

It’s the Structure

The programmatic aspect of the venture, however, was not the new element. A report on the New York project identifies the Bay Area Training and Education Collaborative in California and similar projects in Arkansas and Ohio as precursors in establishing “career pathways” in information technology for poor adults.

The most significant accomplishment, said

Alssid, was the structure of the project. NYCIT spread out responsibilities among “core” partners as well as colleges and community-based nonprofits.

The Structured Employment Economic Development Corporation, a Manhattan-based intermediary, became the primary contact working with local nonprofits, which provided outreach, recruitment, assessment and overall case management, social support services, placement and retention in Northern Manhattan, the Bronx and one in Brooklyn and Queens.

Seedco also tapped \$3.97 in public funds, including WIA dollars. This leveraged the \$1.2 million obtained by WSC from private sources.

WSC developed the resource strategy and played an intermediary role in strengthening links among the collaborative members.

The New York Software Industry Association reached out to employers.

La Guardia Community College developed entry-level curriculum and the City University of New York developed intermediate curriculum to help placed individuals advance.

The idea was not merely to start a program but to create a system with many points of entry, said Alssid, so that individuals could launch their careers, come back for skills upgrading as incumbents and continue advancing. “It’s a whole new way of doing business,” he said.

Instead of operating separate and parallel workforce, community college, welfare and other programs, he suggested, in a collaborative approach, all could work together.

“What’s needed are partnerships to overcome the animosities,” Alssid said, noting problems between the WIA and community college systems. “Employers get a bad impression when the publicly funded programs are all in their own corners.”

The WIA agencies, in particular the one-stop system, envision something of this nature, he added.

WSC is planning a series of best practice, policy and how-to papers. In the meantime, the organization has reached out to organizations in other locations, recently in Louisiana. Until the materials or more local visits are available, Alssid has advice for would-be collaborators.

“Don’t build on one funding stream alone,” he said. “And don’t make the outreach to employers a once-a-year thing.”

He recommended talking to the line managers in an industry, rather than just the human resources pro-

fessionals.

“Build in mechanisms for continuous improvement,” he emphasized.

In one course for an industry-required certification, the group discovered that 22 students were be-

ing prepared for the previous year’s test. Since then, the technology had changed, as had the test.

—Cecilio Morales

About ETR — The *Employment & Training Reporter* is a weekly trade journal covering the field of workforce development since 1969, with a special emphasis on public sector programs.

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