

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board Program

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Focus: The mission of the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board is to coordinate, develop, and maintain an effective and responsive system of programs and services that integrates the needs of employers for an ample and productive workforce with the needs of Lancaster County residents for meaningful work that enhances their quality of life.

Geographic Area Served: Lancaster County, Pennsylvania – population of approximately 500,000 – One of the top 20 Agricultural producing counties in the USA. (Largest Non-irrigated producer) Large producer of chickens and cows. Lancaster County generally has had one of the lowest unemployment rates in Pennsylvania.

The PA Turnpike is just north of the county and is a heavy logistics area. High tech in the region focuses on wire and plastics. New Holland Farm machinery is in the eastern portion of the county. Banking is large in the Reading area north of Lancaster County. There is a good bit of food manufacturing and printing in Lancaster County. Nearby there is a biotechnology initiative and it has helped fuel the regional healthcare initiative.

Participant Age Level: Generally, age 14 is the minimum but there are a few funding sources that permit service to youth as young as age five. There is not maximum age.

Funding Sources: The WIB operates its programs from a budget made up of approximately 33% WIA dollars and 33% Welfare dollars and 33% private sector, state and foundational funding. The WIB staff and its partners are constantly seeking opportunities to secure funding to advance its strategic plan initiatives. Private funding primarily allows and drives the work of the targeted industry consortiums.

Key Services Abstract: The Lancaster WIB has a diverse approach to economic development. It has developed numerous partnerships that allow for developing a pipeline of workers through the education system as well as enhancing the skills of existing workers in order to continue the focus on high wage and high skill work in the region.

In response to the perceived needs of employers, the CareerLink of Lancaster County has added a workforce readiness process called Ready2Work to its traditional program of labor exchange in an effort to better prepare prospective employees for work. The new system accommodates people who are currently working but looking for a better job, people who have been dislocated because of being laid off, people who are re-entering the workforce after incarceration or a lengthy time on welfare, and young people who are out of school and unemployed. Job placement and retention of the job is the ultimate outcome.

There are essentially five steps to the process...

- Assessment
- Pre employment training
- Job readiness preparation
- Placement
- Retention

Upon completion of the Job Readiness part of the program, participants will have a portfolio as they move into the placement phase that includes at minimum a WorkKeys profile. It is anticipated that participants will also have other credentials to include in their files as a result of their participation in other parts of the process. Persons that complete the Job Readiness part of the curriculum and are judged by the cut score established with input from the area business people to be “job ready” receive a Career Readiness Credential, endorsed by the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the CareerLink of Lancaster County.

Companies around Lancaster County guarantee a job interview to graduates of the Job Readiness program who match their job profiles. When the CareerCenter matches the graduate and the company and the graduate completes 3 months of successful employment the company makes a donation of \$75 to the WIB to help re-coop the training costs.

Entrepreneurial Development Program activities are organized and directed by the Lancaster WIB and staff with the partnership of the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce that works with the Keystone Innovation Zone initiative and other Self Employment initiatives.

The SEA program (Self Employment Assistance is a state funded initiative for individuals recently unemployed and who have a strong business plan in mind) is small as the region seems more focused on “place based” economic development strategies than “people based” economic development strategies. The Lancaster WIB seems to see entrepreneurial preparation programs as a small component of the broader work of economic development for the region.

Partners such as SCORE are working with not only new start-up businesses but they are also working with existing businesses. They provide continuing counseling and mentoring, as well as SCORE volunteers serving as boards of directors for non-profits. SCORE provides through its volunteer’s retail and contractor roundtables in order to allow “learning communities” to develop to allow business to prosper. (Only one type of business is allowed in a specific roundtable in order to not have competitors limit the openness of discussions-eg only one ladies dress shop in a retail roundtable)

The Small Business Development Center connected with Universities in the State works with the WIB to impact businesses especially those in Keystone Innovation Zones who are involved with technology transfer along with a private sector partner.

Assets Lancaster is a Small Business Development organization that operates a business incubator and connects all of its clients with mentors in the same business field as they are initiating. They have about an 80% success rate and to date had 237 businesses they have helped start. They offer connections to funding through the First Community Fund.

The Biz Center in the Lancaster County Public Libraries is a wonderful asset for all the counseling and mentoring organizations who work with aspiring entrepreneurs. The main library in downtown

Lancaster has two staff members who run the Biz Center and they are extremely helpful with marketing research. Biz Centers exist in all branches but all do not have the concentrated staff assistance.

Summary of Key Benefits and Results: By letting the industry personnel guide the WIB initiatives there seems to have been an effective partnership for focusing on high skill high wage industries.

The US DOL has provided a regional Innovation Grant to allow the region to continue its focus on improving the economic conditions of the entire region.

The State of Pennsylvania has put in place the Keystone Innovation Zone program that allows state and local taxes to be reduced on tracts of land so that businesses are encouraged to establish themselves in the state. This work has caused many organizations to view Pennsylvania as entrepreneur friendly.

Taking the long view, the Lancaster WIB sees itself as part of a network for organizations in Lancaster County that form a local Innovation System whose purpose is to assure that the competitive advantages of key regional industries are sustained and grow. The WIB knows that a skilled workforce is essential to competitiveness but also know that technology commercialization, entrepreneurship, local research and development, and location amenities are components of regional economic growth.

For the last three years, the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board has been a partner in Lancaster Prospers, the economic development collaborative that has been charged with building a local Innovation System for Lancaster County. The WIB has been responsible for implementing the Centers of Excellence strategy, one of seven strategies in the current work plan.

There are currently four Centers of Excellence

- Production Agriculture;
- Long-Term Care Practice;
- Packaging Operations;
- Radio Frequency Identification

As the Lancaster WIB has defined them, Centers of Excellence have five essential functions

- Local research and development;
- Technology transfer activities;
- Entrepreneurial development activities; See the powerpoint on Entrepreneurship at <http://www.lancastercountywib.com/images/stories/documents/PPT/Entrepreneurship.ppt>
- Incumbent worker training; and
- Maintenance of a pipeline from school to work for essential careers

Major economic development organizations, community-based organizations, and educational institutions have partnered with the WIB to achieve its mission. Lancaster County WIB has been a leader in developing industry partnerships from 2002 when the Lancaster County Workforce Investment Board received a grant to work in the health care industry. The WIB now operate industry partnerships in food processing, industrial maintenance, metal manufacturing, plastics manufacturing, printing, and construction.

The WIB participates in the logistics and transportation partnership run by the South Central Workforce Investment Board and the biotechnology partnership run by the Life Science Career Alliance.

Several partnerships have become Centers of Excellence...Production Agriculture, Long-Term Care Practice, Packaging Operations, and Radio Frequency Identification where the mission of incumbent worker training joins school to career pipeline development, local research and development, technology transfer activities, and entrepreneurial development as a way of connecting to local innovation systems.

The Incumbent Worker Training program has provided nearly 2 Million state dollars for training within the eight industry partnerships that presently exist. There is a shared approach to ensure that all industries are able to hire some of the newly trained workers.

The workforce investment board and staff have been aggressive in establishing training and partnerships that seem to be needed and have reached out into other counties as needed. (For example the Bio-Tech initiative involves 9 different counties.)

Lessons Learned: The WIB meets the WIA core performance standards but realizes that the measures are measuring what was accomplished primarily in the CareerLink Center 1 to 2 years in the past. The focus on current and future needs is not a focus of the WIA common performance measures and that should be changed.

Some of the local research and development empower entrepreneurs. There remains a need for a place for a person with an innovation or improvement idea to go and test that idea. Communities of practice or centers of excellence could provide innovation centers for persons (intrapreneurs) to tinker with improvement processes or innovation that might result in patents. For example the many organizations currently focusing on energy conservation practices could spend more focused discussions as well as R&D as a community of practice or centers of excellence to focus on this emerging “green initiative” if there was a innovation center to encourage this type of innovation focus.

More research and development in the Lancaster area to generate concepts that are needed and proven that could be executed by innovative businesses in the region would help build the economy.

Quicker access to training, counseling and mentoring is needed. Continuing support from the unemployment funds if they are unemployed, greater access to funds to assist with start up of their business concept if they desire to become entrepreneurs.

The strategic initiatives are an on-going initiative of the Lancaster WIB and its numerous partners that are constantly working as a network of partners and all participate in the strategic doing essential to enhance the economy of the region.