ETA Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative:

BEST PRACTICES:
LANCASTER COUNTY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD, PA
INTRODUCTION

This case study was originally written as a part of the Workforce Systems Sector Strategies Guide, a document created through a partnership of Maher & Maher and the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, as a part of the USDOL Employment and Training Administration’s multi-year Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative.

The Guide focused on innovation employed in the design and implementation of sector strategies within workforce development over the last two decades. The programs included in the case study portion of the guide demonstrated advanced thinking in one or more of the five elements of ETA’s Sector Strategies Framework: Data-Based Decision Making, Industry Engagement, Organizational Capacity and Alignment, Sector-Based Service Delivery, and Sustainability and Continuous Improvement.

LANCASTER COUNTY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD, PA

Interview with Scott Sheely

SECTOR STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The WIB started under WIA working in close partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and economic development. The economic development perspective likely encouraged the Board to recognize employers, as partners to the system, were as important as job seekers. Early strategic planning looked to data to determine what employers needed. The WIB tried to embrace workforce development as part of economic development, much like the new WIA envisioned. The Board wanted to understand the drivers of the economy, understand where there is growth, and understand the sectors where the county is most competitive. The Board also envisioned its economic development contribution to be more proactive than doing a deal. Early, the WIB embraced the work of Michael Porter as a guide. It quickly recognized resource limitations (money) required the Board to set priorities. The early work resulted in a plan to focus on 5-7 sectors.
DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Much of the first data accumulated was anecdotal. Labor Market Information tools, at the time, were not user friendly. Better data and the tools to manipulate it came later as demand from users grew. EMSI was most helpful to Lancaster WIB in the beginning, and their partnership continued for years. The Board was looking for industries with good job growth (past and future), a location quotient indicating an existing competitive advantage (measure of industry concentration), good jobs (pay a sustaining wage), and of significant size. The criteria quickly discounted some otherwise obvious candidates. Lancaster County enjoys a large hospitality industry. It is home to a popular tourist destination and an easy commute from major urban areas. However, wage issues caused the Board to not accept the industry as a priority for workforce investment. Responses from other industries varied. While healthcare represented a large number of good jobs, employers sometimes were more interested in working with the public workforce system that at other times. Also, the location quotient for healthcare indicates the County is just above the national average in terms of its impact on the local economy. Manufacturing was the most fertile opportunity for the WIB. Manufacturing employers have stayed involved with the local workforce system. The WIB even breaks that sector into smaller units as the most effective way to engage the relatively large number of employers.

When convening employers, the WIB confirms its data findings with employers. Often, the first meetings are about validating the data. Some groups make quickly; others take years to come together. One recommendation from an experienced leader was to not push a group before it is ready. Let the group's leadership emerge. At a strategic level, the WIB decided that two people from each industry cluster will join the WIB as members. The two, as WIB members, then lead the industry group. Also, the Board hires subject matter experts, as contractors, to be part-time project managers. Typically, the subject matter experts have a consulting or engineering practice. This arrangement allows the Board to attract and retain people they may not otherwise be able to afford. Competent and professional staff work is critical when employers are defining expectations for the group and the public workforce system.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

The WIB found incumbent worker training is great entry to engage industry. The training enables quick outcomes and can be useful in building relationships. As trust in the system builds, employers engage about other needs as well. Good employer relationships brought change in the one stop center operations. Employers demanded better screening and better referrals. They found value in more pre-employment activity. As a result, the Board changed assessment, expanded pre-employment activity, and embraced career pathways as part of employer focused solutions. The Board also learned to segregate responsibility within the system. Partners on the steering group are not vendors to the system. It, in effect, divides service delivery from evaluation. The WIB retains leadership for the system in the industry efforts.

The WIB believes it best to engage employers before engaging K-12. While data from employers is valuable to public education and consumers, the Board has to do the employer work before proposing change to education. For instance, the Lancaster WIB found equivalent jobs (in knowledge, skills abilities) that led their career pathways
work across industries. They found comparable basic skills requirements in five industries where companies can follow with specific company training. The Board found of the county's top 100 jobs, knowledge and skill requirements are maybe 85% alike. If the initial findings prove out, there are implications for pathways. The Board intends to keep it data driven. Close work with employers also caused the Board to realize some training needed to be bilingual or Spanish. The language issue found in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation logistics caused a different approach to training and behavior in the system.

SECTOR-BASED SERVICE DELIVERY

Regarding program service area limitations, the Board recognized supply chains do not care about program boundaries. Business does business without regard to city limits or county lines. A state grant to the Lancaster WIB and its neighboring WIB partners demonstrated success with a plastics consortium as a statewide approach. Content of training was shared among providers and across WIB boundaries but the regional industry initiative expired with the grant. The effort demonstrated great possibilities in terms of regional cooperation where there is a common problem identified through a foundation of good data.

In summary, the Lancaster WIB leads its Board and industry groups with the best data it can find, gets employer feedback to data accuracy, defines specifics on which industries to focus in its strategic plan, and indicates what will be done for the targeted industries. After engaging employers, there is a commitment to do what they suggest.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Finding consistent funding continues to be an issue. One hit grants are probably not a solution. Their Board wants to build on-going industry work with regular formula funding. Finally, according to Scott Sheely, the system should invest in sectors because the returns are better than we have seen otherwise.