ETA Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative:

BEST PRACTICES:
VERMONT HITEC
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.

VERMONT HITEC

Interview with CEO, Gerry Ghazi

SECTOR STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The Vermont Health Information and Technology Education Center (HITEC) is a sector-based initiative in Williston, Vermont working in the Advanced Manufacturing, IT, and Health Care sectors. It has been in operation since 2000, when it was established as a nonprofit educational organization. Since then, HITEC has served over twenty-five regional employers and over one thousand individuals seeking education, skills training, career advancement, or college internships.

Vermont HITEC partners with the Institute for American Apprenticeship at Burlington College, which offers certificates, AA, BA, and MA degrees to HITEC participants. These credentials are competency-based, rather than hourly-based, and can be earned through classwork plus OJT sponsored by employer partners. This “hybrid” practice, used by HITEC for the past 14 years, has allowed it to create what it refers to as “accelerated apprenticeships” that can be earned in one year, rather than the traditional two years.

HITEC focuses its education and training on the unemployed and underemployed youth and adults in the region.
Every graduate of the program is guaranteed a job with their employer sponsor.

DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

Rather than relying solely on current LMI, Vermont HITEC secures a commitment from employers to hire program graduates, who are “sponsored” by participating employers. It is this commitment on the part of employers, more so than its interpretation of LMI, that drives Vermont HITEC’s operations. Perhaps more than most sector-based approaches, Vermont HITEC has placed employers in the lead by permitting them to determine, to a large extent, how services are designed and delivered.

INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

As a Registered Apprenticeship with the Department of Labor, HITEC engages industry through recruiting them to participate as employer sponsors for HITEC students. HITEC employer-sponsored students, or to incumbent workers with employer sponsors. As such, “employer engagement,” as it is typically understood in sector-based programs, is less about placing employers in the lead operational role, and more about securing employer commitment by ensuring that the services provided are precisely what the industry requires.

HITEC began in 2000 with a full-time training program for medical transcriptionists, creating the curriculum and providing an eight-month course at the Community College of Vermont in Newport. Each graduate was also offered full-time, work-at-home employment with EDiX, a subsidiary of IDX Systems Corporation (now GE Healthcare).

In 2003, HITEC began its program in IT, training students as interface analysts, software analysts, web developers, software developers, account managers and installation consultants. All graduates from these education programs received a Vermont HITEC certificate and a state-registered US DOL Apprenticeship Certificate of Completion.

In 2005, HITEC began training students for employment with advanced manufacturing firms in the region. In addition to a Vermont HITEC certificate, all 356 of the program graduates received between 27 and 42 college credits and a Certificate in Advanced Machine Tool Technology from River Valley Community College (RVCC) established through an articulation agreement.

SECTOR-BASED SERVICE DELIVERY
HITEC has developed one of the more innovative approaches yet to sector-based service delivery. Taking full advantage of its status as a registered apprenticeship program, and the inherently close working relationships with employers that this status confers, HITEC creates curricula by documenting what workers learn on the job while producing a product or a service for a partner employer. The truly innovative component to this process is that the “workers” are what are referred to as “pseudo-employees,” who submit to the all of the standard on-boarding procedures, including background checks and drug screens, for a participating employer, but, in fact, remain on HITEC’s payroll. Through this agreement with participating employers, HITEC staff are permitted to document the production processes, reverse engineer the final product, and translate this information into curricula that can be used to train additional workers for the employer. National certifications are built into the curricula, and assessments are competency-based. The entire curriculum development process takes from 1-2 years, with training ultimately taking place at the worksite and condensed from the typical 2-year apprenticeship program to a 12-month program.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Typical of its innovation generally, HITEC has approached sustainability of its program creatively, relying more on rigorous analysis of its results than anything else. Vermont HITEC has used econometric modeling to demonstrate, both to potential employer partners and to funders, the return on investment in program participants. The program begins with a commitment to working with unemployed and underemployed individuals, but not without vetting them with a lengthy and detailed selection process. Once selected for the program, workers are selected by employer sponsors who commit to hiring them once they have completed the apprenticeship program. Program administrators then take this commitment to federal and state funders to request support. HITEC taps into 12 separate funding streams to cover the total costs of the program, including tuition, fees, books and other expenses. This approach has enabled HITEC to maintain and expand its operations over the past 20 plus years, training over 1300 workers and currently working 12 employers across three industry sectors, without requiring payment from either employers or workers.

RESOURCES:
Additional information can be found at: www.vthtec.org