

Colorado SECTORS Initiative: Greater Metro Denver Healthcare Industry Partnership

MARCH 2013 CASE STUDY



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COLORADO'S SECTORS INITIATIVE

In May 2009, The Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) jointly awarded funding to super-regions throughout the state. Funding was provided to regional workforce partnerships to plan a sector strategy, and many of these grantees received additional funding for the implementation of these activities. Since 2009, ten grants have been awarded to target industries including aerospace, healthcare, manufacturing, renewable energy, and water/wastewater management. Sector initiatives are developed through local public-private partnerships, are industry focused, and include workforce development, economic development, education and other stakeholders to address high priority workforce challenges within an industry.

BACKGROUND

The Denver-Metro area employs over 1.2 million full time workers.¹ The healthcare and social assistance sector, the focus of this project, is the largest in the metro region and employs about 142,000 workers, in over 6,800 facilities.² This sector continues to grow in the region with population increases and the construction of new hospitals and a large healthcare facility, the Anschutz campus.

In July 2009, Adams County Education Consortium (ACEC) received a planning grant from CDLE to develop a sector strategy in healthcare. ACEC acted as the convener of this project. They partnered with the Adams County Workforce and Business Center which served as the fiscal agent for the grant. ACEC also developed strategic partnerships with the workforce investment boards (WIBs) of Adams County and Arapahoe/Douglas Counties, which led to the creation of the Greater Metro Denver Healthcare WIB subcommittee. The planning grant also resulted in partnerships with private and public healthcare businesses and educational institutions through meetings and strategic planning forums. One of these forums was held for over 50 employers in the region and provided information about high demand occupations and healthcare workforce trends. Additionally, during the planning grant surveys to industry were used to gather information about the training and education needs of the workforce.

Overall the planning grant served as a method to understand the area's needs and led to the creation of the Greater Metro Denver Healthcare Industry Partnership. The Partnership applied for and received an implementation grant from CDLE. The Colorado Urban Workforce Alliance (CUWA, formerly Denver Metro Workforce Board) serves as the convener and Arapahoe/Douglas Works! serves as the fiscal agent for this implementation funding. The group

¹ The unemployment rate in this region is currently 7.4%, slightly lower than the current national average.

²<http://www.colmigateway.com/vosnet/lmi/area/areasummary.aspx?section=populationdata&session=areadetail&geo=0821019740>

has tremendous buy-in from regional employers, educational institutions and government agencies.

The Greater Metro Denver Healthcare Industry Partnership (the Partnership) was initiated to respond to challenges identified by local healthcare employers. Most notably this sector project sought to find ways to address the shortage of qualified applicants for open positions in the region's healthcare facilities. This focus emerged from the Partnership's planning grant analysis of the current and anticipated needs for a variety of healthcare occupations in the area and the current number of job seekers in Connecting Colorado who held the relevant credentials. The inconsistency between job seekers and available jobs led the Partnership to focus on high-demand positions within the healthcare field. Through research and discussion with employers, the Partnership identified a need to improve access to training and to increase availability of qualified candidates for the following occupations: Nurses (ADN, RN, BSN), Medical Laboratory Technicians (MLT), Medical Technologists (MT), and Surgical Technicians.

The implementation sector grant began on March 1, 2011. The project manager started 4 months later in June 2011.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project sought to address the following goals:

- Develop an industry driven partnership to review human capital needs and workforce challenges in the region in order to create a talent development pipeline for the local healthcare industry;
- Develop a streamlined process so that job seekers accessing workforce center services are informed of occupational opportunities in the healthcare sector;
- Strengthen the use of the workforce system's services by Partnership members and organizations;
- Identify supply-side healthcare workforce partners within the super-region specifically targeting youth and adults with low-skills;
- Develop a fundraising strategy to create a sustainable partnership model.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Partnership includes representatives from industry, educational institutions, economic development, and workforce development (See Appendix A).

The principal Partnership committee meets bi-monthly. Meetings involve discussions and updates on current work, decisions about where to concentrate resources, funding and sustainability, as well as updates from the project manager on the work of the established subcommittees. The subcommittees, which report to the larger group, were developed to serve as working groups focused on different areas of project implementation. The membership of the subcommittees reflects strategic decisions. Each committee is composed of key individuals who are directly involved with the job or task in question.

The subcommittees, called work groups, have played an important role in the implementation of grant activities.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The Business Executive Committee consists of human resources executives and employers from the healthcare industry and is charged with determining the direction of the project, targeted occupations and investment of training dollars into the recommended training programs.

The Education and Training Work Group is responsible for reaching out to the region's healthcare employers and collecting information about their anticipated hiring needs. Based on received information, the group identifies appropriate educational institutions and partners that can meet the identified need(s) through education and training.

The Process and Procedure Work Group consists of workforce staff from Adams County, Denver County and Arapahoe/Douglas County, including operations managers, Individual Training Account (ITA) supervisors, talent development managers, workforce specialists, as well as representatives from business services. The group has streamlined forms and processes within the respective WFC regions to ensure enrollment is comprehensive and efficient. Staff from the workforce centers have also identified local workforce funding through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). This funding supports eligible students and job seekers as they engage in training in the healthcare occupations targeted by the Partnership.

Subject Matter Expert (SME) work groups were also created to identify and solve the workforce challenges in the targeted occupations. The SMEs are made up of staff representatives from partner healthcare facilities in the region. While the human resources executives are the representatives for their facilities at the general Partnership meetings, it was collectively decided that the people who would know best about the needs for training would be those directly involved with the occupation. Separate SME groups were therefore convened by the project manager for nursing, medical lab technicians and technologists and surgical technicians.

Each of these work groups meets on a routine basis and the project manager shares the decisions and conclusions across groups and with the principal committee. With her knowledge

of the activities of each of the workgroups, the project manager is able to best determine the most effective way to address the training and workforce challenges in the target occupations.

Training

Implementation grant funding and local ITA funding were used to support incumbent and new workers in: an accelerated BSN program at Metro State; Medical Laboratory Scientist training at the Colorado Center for Medical Laboratory Science, a program of Metro State; Medical Laboratory Technician training at Arapahoe Community College; Clinical Scholar training for nurses at partner healthcare entities at the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence; and sterile processing for Surgical Technicians at Children’s Hospital Colorado. These occupations were identified by the Partnership’s industry representatives and subject matter experts, as were the preferred training institutions. During the site visit to the Partnership, the Rutgers evaluation team conducted focus groups and interviews with participants from both the Clinical Scholar and the Medical Technologist programs. These two grant training activities are highlighted below.

Clinical Scholar Training was identified as an essential focal point of grant training activities. In the past few years there has been a critical shortage of clinical teachers and preceptors in the region’s hospital system, thus limiting the numbers of nursing students and new hires who could be trained in the Metro area. The training program was provided by the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence. In a 40 hour course, nurses already employed at local healthcare facilities, are trained to be clinical scholars/instructors. The Clinical Scholar training was strongly promoted by the nursing subject matter experts and was an important step in addressing the shortage of nurses in the region.

The training for **Medical Laboratory Scientists (Medical Technologists) and Medical Laboratory Technicians** was also a major focus of the grant. The Metro State and Arapahoe programs are the only training programs for these positions in the Denver Metro Area. The SMEs targeted funding to students enrolled at Metro State University.

IMPACT / RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Employers and professional development staff, who met with the Rutgers team in a focus group, stated that the nurses who had participated in the Clinical Scholar training seemed to be happier in their professions. The nurses also reported feeling greater confidence in their skills subsequent to the training. The long term goal for training Clinical Scholars is to be able to expand the number of new hires and students in the hospitals.

SMEs stressed that increasing the number of trained Clinical Scholars is good for nursing students too. They commented that their newly trained Clinical Scholars were much more self-assured and willing to take on increased student placements. One partner healthcare institution indicated that they were able to increase their student placement capacity by 36%. SMEs also

noted that when nurses are more confident in their teaching abilities, nursing students are able to have a safer and more valuable experience and are in turn more prepared to begin their professional careers. The SMEs noted that the increased level of self-confidence was good for retention for both incumbent workers and nursing students.

The importance of the Clinical Scholar training in meeting a critical need is also reflected in the increasing demand for the training. A senior representative from the University of Colorado Health system noted that there is a waiting list for nurses who want to enroll in this training. Other healthcare partners also shared that there are similar demands at their facilities.

The training has also made an impact on career paths. A representative from University of Colorado Health system stated that the hospital promoted two of the nurses who went through the Clinical Scholar training. These promotions from preceptor to Clinical Scholar came with pay increases. Other healthcare facilities also noted that some of the nurses who had gone through the Clinical Scholar had decided to pursue a Master's degree in nursing as a result of the training.

SMEs from the Medical Laboratory Technician and Medical Technologist group identified the impacts of providing funding to students currently enrolled in these programs. Federal student aid is not as readily available for students in this program as it is for an undergraduate education and therefore students often turn to private loans to support their education. The tuition assistance and services available both through the grant and local workforce dollars has relieved the financial burden on many students and helped to expand program capacity.

A representative from a health facility noted that while there are many applicants for job openings of positions for Medical Technologists and Medical Laboratory Technologists, it is very seldom that there is a wide selection of highly qualified or desirable candidates, making it challenging to fill positions. Metro State has established a reputation for producing quality candidates for healthcare employment. Increasing the cohort capacity at Metro State has been an important step in increasing the number of qualified medical technologists to fill openings.

To this point, the director of the medical technology program at Metro State indicated that every student who graduated from the previous cohort had obtained employment and expected the cohort receiving grant support to have similar success with employment.

CHALLENGES

The Partnership experienced a variety of challenges with the implementation of the grant. One of the most significant was securing group consensus among industry representatives regarding the value of working together to improve employment issues in the regional healthcare system. Subject matter experts described their initial meeting experience as a challenge due to competition within the industry and noted that consensus regarding best practices in training and hiring was not easy. However once common problems and goals were established, the

value in working together was clear. Some of the benefits of partnership included the creation of better curricula, the ability to train people more efficiently, the pooling of resources, the ability to have more people do training and internship hours on site, and the single point of contact with the workforce system. Additionally, representatives discussed they were somewhat surprised to find that the problems they were experiencing were universal and might be better solved as a group.

Another challenge that presented itself was the difficulty streamlining workforce system policies and procedures across various workforce regions. This included eligibility forms and paperwork, ITA amounts, and residency requirements. Policies and procedures varied across workforce areas within the Partnership's region. This challenge was addressed by the Process and Procedure Workgroup (PPW). According to the PPW, it became clear that in order to work effectively with industry partners in the region and to achieve the goals set forth by the Partnership, the workforce systems across the geographic area would have to work together to make processes and procedures clear, uniform, and easy to navigate. As such, the PPW developed universal forms, processes, and ITA caps for training associated with the Partnership.

Another important challenge addressed by the PPW was a successful restructuring of the enrollment process. The results of this effort were particularly evident at an event where staff representatives enrolled 24 MLTs in the grant program and provided them with funding within one hour using the universal procedures. Enrollees met in a convenient location (medical facility) and did not need to visit a workforce center. This group has also begun to discuss other emerging challenges such as when it is best to co-enroll a client in multiple workforce programs and the reasons why co-enrollment might benefit a Partnership client.

LESSONS LEARNED / BEST PRACTICES

- All work groups noted that the **project manager's position** has been essential to success. The project manager is responsible for convening all meetings and bringing together staff from each area. A member of the Process and Procedure Work Group noted that the progress that has been made through the collaborative partnerships and subcommittees would not have been possible without the direction and dedication of the project manager.
- **Streamline and coordinate policies across the region.** Taking a regional streamlined approach was highly effective. The partnership provided a central place to make decisions and launch ideas and projects. Additionally, it prevented employers from having to deal with different workforce regions and government agencies repeatedly approaching them to engage in duplicative partnerships and programs.

- **Develop a universal screening and enrollment procedure among workforce areas.** To meet the needs of industry, staff from the different regions recognized that it was crucial to work together and to develop a seamless process for both job seekers and employers.
- **In-person partnership and work group meetings.** Face-to-face meetings were imperative in successfully working together. For example, one healthcare representative specified that she had chosen to speak by conference call for the first two meetings, and immediately felt a stronger connection once she physically attended a meeting and worked with the other SMEs.
- **Sector strategy should be industry-driven.** It was essential that the goals and priorities of the implementation grant were driven by industry rather than by workforce development or higher education.
- **Allow industry and workforce to establish training needs.** Educational institutions were invited to join the partnership after industry and workforce representatives identified target occupations and their goals. This facilitated the development of training courses and programs that better met industry needs, including the “retro-fitting” of some courses offered through colleges to better correspond to changes in the field.
- **Seek the input of industry professionals.** Subject matter experts and health care professionals provided firsthand experience and insights about employee skill sets and the qualities that are needed for success in a healthcare job. Their input resulted in effective recruitment and training activities to address and respond to the needs of industry employers.

FINANCIAL AND LEVERAGED RESOURCES

The partnership was awarded \$425,000 for implementation activities. A total of \$154,732.03 was committed for incumbent and new worker training through the grant funds. As of January 2013, a total of \$110,604.03 has been spent. Additionally, three workforce regions have leveraged a total of \$280,903.05 through ITAs. Healthcare facilities contributed in-kind dollars in staff time, totaling \$22,894.79. The Aurora Chamber of Commerce contributed in-kind dollars in meeting and office space for the Project Manager, totaling \$33,043.32. To date, matching funds provided by partners totals \$55,938.11.

SUSTAINABILITY

The work of the Partnership continues and it has received additional funding through a \$75,000 grant from CDLE. This new funding is being used to expand and integrate activities with the Denver Area Health Care Recruiters Association (DAHCRRA). DAHCRRA will work with the Partnership’s project manager and the Workforce Triage Team, representing the three workforce regions and employers. The goal is to improve outreach to and recruitment of

potential employees through the use of online job postings in *Connecting Colorado* and customized recruitment fairs. The target healthcare occupations will be emphasized in these activities. Further, DAHCRA will work with prospective applicants on job preparation and interview skills to improve the pipeline of candidates coming into the healthcare facilities. DAHCRA will also work to raise workers' awareness of the services and financial support available through the workforce development system.

The new funding will also be used to develop consistent protocols and standards for the workforce system, as well as to support the training of incumbent workers and job seekers in the targeted occupations. In addition to funding provided by CDLE, industry and workforce partners will continue to contribute staff time and financial resources to the sustainability of the initiative. Subject matter experts and human resource representatives are committed to continuing their participation in order to address the ongoing workforce challenges in the healthcare industry. A sustainability work group has been established to explore the continuation of the project infrastructure, including the funding of staff to coordinate the overall efforts of the healthcare sector strategy.

ABOUT

Rutgers University's School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on the world of work, building effective and sustainable organizations, and the changing employment relationship. The school is comprised of two departments—one focused on all aspects of strategic human resource management and the other dedicated to the social science specialties related to labor studies and employment relations. In addition, SMLR provides many continuing education and certificate programs taught by world-class researchers and expert practitioners. For more information, visit www.smlr.rutgers.edu

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APPENDIX A

List of Sector Partners

- Arapahoe/Douglas Works!
- Adams County Workforce Investment Board
- Adams County Workforce and Business Center
- City and County of Denver Workforce Investment Board
- Denver Office of Economic Development – Workforce Development
- Aurora Chamber of Commerce
- HealthOne/Spalding Rehabilitation Hospital
- Children’s Hospital
- Denver Health and Hospital Authority
- Community College of Aurora
- Adams County Education Consortium
- Kaiser Permanente Colorado Region
- Central Colorado Area Health Education Center
- Tri County Health Department
- University of Colorado Denver School of Medicine Colorado WIN Partners
- University of Colorado Hospital
- Centura Health
- Platte Valley Medical Center

APPENDIX B

ACTIVITY	TOTAL PLANNED	TOTAL ACTUAL	% OF GOAL
Entered training	80	113	141%
Completed training	69	72	104%
Earned certificate or industry credential	67	72	107%

*Outcomes are to date. Grant continues through 6/30/13.