Business Services Redesign

Cumberlands Workforce Investment Area

Regional Input Session

October 12, 2011

NOTES

Participants represented the following organizations/ agencies:

- Somerset Community College
- Campbellsville University
- Lake Cumberland Area Development District
- Office of Employment and Training
- Russell County Industrial Development Authority

There were approximately 10 participants.

Rapid Response Activities

The methods utilized for finding out about layoffs include WARN notices, word of mouth, or an increase in unemployment insurance. If the information about the layoff is received early enough, the Rapid Response Team then makes presentation to soon-to-be dislocated workers. Ideally, this is conducted on-site. The team includes:

- WIA
- Adult Education
- Vocational Rehab
- UI

Childcare is an issue and travel time is also an issue for individuals who are dislocated.

Relationships made via business services have helped identify transitional skills that may be possible during one Rapid Response on to employment.

Although there isn't a good way to track the number of Rapid Response participants that return to the Career Centers for additional services, participants in the sessions reported anecdotally that probably 99% of these individuals return for UI and approximately 15% come in for training assistance.

When a layoff or closure is due to a corporate decision, it is difficult to prevent.

Recommendations for the Rapid Response System

In the Cumberlands region, the Rapid Response doesn't just share information about the services that are available to help individuals now, but also include labor market information, hiring trends and other optimistic, positive information. The Team has tried to orient information toward available jobs and *reemployment* because the region does have employers who are in need of workers.

Business Services Activities

The Cumberlands region is in the process of forming three business services teams, each covering three – five counties in each.

There is currently not a way to share information. The workforce investment board is exploring additions to its website that can offer a platform for information about businesses that all the partners can see. The partners have had to create their own mechanism for communication and information sharing.

- A good network is in place.
- The knowledge-base about local services and assistance is driven by individuals and personal relationships. Partners know who to call when a business needs "X, Y, or Z."

The region's business services representatives have a good relationship with the local SHRM chapter(s).

The power of collective services is key; a single agency can't always do it, but someone else can. Business services representatives are not selling just what WIA can do, but what is available from all partners.

All partners can't talk to the same employer.

It takes strategic partners to make North American companies competitive. The partners have to have information early on in order to help.

The work with businesses must be confidential.

Local economic developers are the ones that "are in the know" and who have the relationships with businesses. Sometimes, a business will contact the chamber of commerce first. These are usually the smaller employers.

- The Economic Development Cabinet has developed programs for existing businesses that can be leveraged.
- When asked, the business services representatives will go on calls with economic development for expansions or attractions.
- Two new sites are being considered for relocating the Career Centers. These two locations are co-located with the economic development organizations for these two counties.

When working with economic development, it is important to note the following:

- The structure in each county or area is different. Some economic development organizations are affiliated with the chamber of commerce; others are not.
- The local economic development professionals need to be at the table. Some are already involved and others are more difficult to engage.

The region has opened the Career Center to the Industrial Consortium so that they are more familiar with services.

The methods for targeting businesses include:

- Following up with businesses that have previously worked with the Career Center and any new businesses that locate in the area.
- SHRM and the Industrial Consortium – through the WINS project, free training can be provided to the members of the Industrial Consortium.
- Making connections on the soccer field!

Because of monetary constraints, there isn't enough time for staff to work solely on business services. So the penetration rate suffers.

Probably 90% of the businesses are repeat customers. Once they access services, they see the workforce system as a value-add. But getting employers to work with the system for the first time is difficult. It is made as easy as possible for the employers, but federal documentation and paperwork is perceived as time intensive.

Developing a relationship with a business often depends on who the point of contact is at the company. Working with an HR Manager is usually great, but sometimes it gets handed off and slowed down. Business services representatives have to find the right person at the company to make it work.

In a local survey to employers, one of the biggest challenges that was identified was the lack of soft skills. In the Cumberlands area, soft skills need to be target sector.

- There are some community based organizations that provide services to help with retention of new employees (soft skill training/ development). One of the participants noted that he would like to see everyone at the Career Center or everyone collecting unemployment insurance to go through a soft skills training.
- Somerset Community College partners with Hendrickson, a large employer in the area, on a pre-employment training that includes 2 days of orientation and then a skills training.

The Cumberlands WIB and staff really work hard to be a strategic partner for businesses. The Cumberlands staff have done a good job. An example of successful layoff aversion is Stidham Cabinets. Because the company needed to shift to mass production for a large order, they applied for funding from the state for training and changed their business.

Recommendations for Business Services System

Sector strategies present a challenge because KCTCS and economic development both have target sectors as well. The strategies of the workforce development system can't be too rigid so that only larger companies benefit. Smaller companies and entrepreneurs still need to be able to access assistance.

There used to be more meetings among workforce investment areas throughout the Commonwealth. This has ended. There was a business services meeting that was organized by the local areas and it was very helpful. One participant stated, "We miss the boat if we don't do more of these." The participants also reported that there needs to be more information sharing within the region's counties as well.

Other Comments

Currently, unemployment insurance means 99 weeks of vacation for some people. There are jobs available, but some people do not want to work. Extended unemployment and drugs are the problem.