Participant Placement Strategies

Case Study Report

Technical Retraining to Achieve Credentials: TRAC-7

Washburn University of Topeka

Topeka, Kansas

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Program Overview:
The project has brought seven institutions together as members of the “TRAC-7” consortium to serve the training needs of the State of Kansas and beyond. While consortium colleges follow a standard core curriculum, each institution has a unique signature program that differs from other member institutions.

The TRAC-7 project builds on the core curriculum for participants to complete their chosen program of study using a variety of technology enabled learning processes. These include online learning, real-time online interactions, and personalized instruction. Hands-on learning has been facilitated using mobile labs or residential short term courses.

Students are assessed into this continuum of competency based training and are able to access it at multiple entry points. Through extensive needs analysis and community outreach these programs are based on industry driven competencies. Successful participants earn industry recognized credentials to increase employer competitiveness when they attempt to enter the workforce.

Consortium Members:
Cloud County Community College, Concordia; Dodge City Community College, Dodge City; Garden City Community College, Garden City; Highland Community College, Highland; Flint Hills Technical College, Emporia; Salina Area Technical College, Salina.

Key Partners:
**Required Employer Partners:** Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company; Atchison Hospital; Westar Energy Inc; Wolf Creek Nuclear Operating Corporation; Ventria Bioscience; Sunflower Electric Power Corporation; City of Arkansas City; Tyson Fresh Meats

**Other Project Partners:** KANSASWorks Workforce System through the Department of Commerce; Local Workforce Investment Boards; Let’s Help; and USD 501 Topeka

TRAC-7 HIGHLIGHTS:

**Type of Grant:** Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grants

**Industry Focus:** Manufacturing; Energy; Agriculture; Biotechnology; and Service (Risk Management & Loss Prevention)

**Period of Performance:** 10/01/2011 – 09/30/2015

**Grant Amount Awarded:** $19,619,450
Identifying and Overcoming Challenges

Initial Challenge: Building Relationships
TRAC-7 Consortium did not anticipate the extent of communication and education that would be required to connect students and potential employers.

Overcoming the Challenge: Increase Communication
Communication between business employers and the TRAC-7 institutions was not strong at the outset of the project. Employers lacked knowledge of the programs offered at the college and there was very little communication between the groups. TRAC-7 Institutions learned that they had to engage employers by creating an institutional body comprised of both project staff and industry personnel. This board would oversee a more collaborative learning process between students, employers and college staff.

Employers on the board influenced college curriculum by providing insight into which specific training methods should be employed to meet the demand of the workforce. For each signature program, the TRAC-7 institutions made intentional efforts to reach out to the employers and inform them of the program launch dates. Employers play an integral part in the development of the skill sets that are taught in the classroom. They worked directly with students on campus and in Coop programs. This close interaction has made a significant difference in the programs offered and has had a great impact on hiring processes and outcome of student placement after graduation.

Initial Challenge: Working with Workforce Centers
Before the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program, TRAC-7 institutions did not have a close working relationship with the local Workforce Centers. Students were not aware of the resources available through the Workforce Centers and were intimidated by the process. Additionally, because Workforce Centers are not geographically co-located with the schools, attaining access to available resources was difficult.

Overcoming the Challenge: Intrusive Advising
The TRAC-7 schools have established an Intrusive Advising position assigned to work on career placement strategies with the students and bridge the gap between the Workforce Centers and the schools. Through this position, the TRAC-7 institutions have built closer relationships with Workforce Centers and TAA case managers. This proactive process has helped students understand what resources are available to navigate their job search. The Intrusive Advisor is also responsible for building personal relationships with the students. This includes understanding the background and life circumstances of the student, such as transportation or childcare, which may hinder their ability to find employment. Skills such as how you apply for a job and how to create a resume are taught to students as well as interview coaching.

Initial Challenge: Managing Access to Financial Aid
At the outset of the TRAC-7 consortium, project managers were not aware of the large number of students enrolled in the programs that were Pre-GED and no longer in high school. According to state legislation, these students did...
Overcoming the Challenge:

The state of Kansas had previously passed a Senate Bill that allows high school students to take technical courses funded by the state. Unfortunately for those students who no longer attended high school and were still Pre-GED, there were no Financial Aid programs available. A new Kansas Senate Bill was passed so that Pre-GED students, who are no longer high school students, can have access to that same pool of money. This was a big systematic change for the state of Kansas that came about because of the success of the TRAC-7 programs and placements.

Activity Analysis: How activities can impact the outcomes and deliverables of your grant program.

Activity: Hands-on Experience

Developing on the job training and COOP programs with direct employer involvement has had a significant impact on the job placement statistics for TRAC-7 institutions. Employers have been so satisfied with the level of knowledge and skill that students possess after program completion that many have dropped the requirement of prior experience in order to hire directly from the TRAC-7 participant pool.

Through an ongoing exchange between schools and employers, curriculum and training programs are developed to ensure that skill set needs are met. Strong employer engagement has led to higher placement numbers for the students upon program completion. Employers are even calling the TRAC-7 schools to fill positions before they are advertised.

Activity: KanVet initiative

The number of military personnel leaving the service in Kansas has been higher than anticipated by the program. TRAC-7 worked with state agencies and public partners through the KanVet program to develop a database that allows veterans to obtain credit for prior learning by identifying specific credits and programs obtained in military training. These credits flow seamlessly into school credits.

Activity 3: Technology Investment

Through the TAACCCT grant, the Kansas TRAC-7 Consortium has been able to invest in the technology needed to train students for today’s employment opportunities. With employers’ input, a new state of the art facility was specifically designed to meet the students training needs. Increased capacity and the latest equipment not qualify for financial aid.

Success Stories shared by Gillian Gabelmann
Associate Dean
Washburn College

The sudden closing of the Dolly Madison plant in Emporia created a number of TAA eligible participants that could be enrolled in the TRAC-7 program. FHTC worked on a rapid response to the closing of the plant. Due to our collaborative efforts with FHTC, 19 TAA eligible participants enrolled in TRAC-7 programs.

The expansion of the AST program in Topeka led to an increase of employment from 29% to 79%.

The AO-K/IBEST model has taken participants from Pre-GED to graduation and led to employment in high skill, high wages careers.

“The tax program is an excellent program to show how change can have a positive impact in the lives of our students. We did things that we never could have done without this funding.”
- Gillian Gableman, Washburn College

The program has been so successful that the Governor’s office is working with the TRAC-7 Consortium to find out what is being done to increase the overall number of students employed.
ensures that the students are learning on the same technology that would be found in the workplace. The investment allows for hands-on training and has led to increased placement.

**Key Lessons Learned:**
The TRAC-7 Consortium has identified the following key lessons:

- Stay true to the grant as it was written. Laying a solid foundation is essential to continued success of the program.
- Incorporating a proactive role in educating the students on the job placement process is essential.
- Change is hard, but when it is serving such a great need in the community, the rewards are great.

**Strategies for Sustainability:**

**Strategy 1: Ongoing Employer Engagement**

Strong Employer Engagement is essential to the long term success of TRAC-7 students.

The TRAC-7 Consortium is committed to maintaining ongoing relationships with employers and students. Continued collaboration with the employer community is essential to sustaining the TAACCCT job placement initiatives in the long term. With employers providing valuable input and ongoing evaluation of the programs offered, it ensures the skill sets taught will meet the demands of the workforce and guarantee student job placement. Employer’s participation and interaction with students on-campus and offsite through COOP programs is key to developing and maintaining these successful relationships.

**Strategy 2: Training & Technology**

An increased capacity of programs leads to increased enrollment resulting in producing graduates with skills that employers want to hire. Adapting to the needs of employers is crucial. Programs need to be vigilant in adopting curriculum that remains relevant to the changing workforce environment. TRAC-7 programs deliver students that have experience with state of the art equipment and are therefore more employable. For the continued success of this program more comprehensive outreach and career planning services are needed. This includes continued education of the TRAC-7 students on the process of looking for employment. Critical to this success is the hiring of a placement coordinator at each TRAC-7 institution. This person would be responsible for increased promotion of the program through the Career Services office at each institution.
Strategy 3: Follow up

There is a strong need to integrate employment data access across the state to follow the TRAC-7 students and track their progression after the completion of the program. The State of Kansas has several disparate applications which are not integrated and data is not shared across state agencies, making this task extremely difficult. Critical to the success of this program will be the development and collaboration between state agencies to report and share employment data. It is essential for the long term success of the TRAC-7 Consortium to have the ability to track students who are placed and follow their progress in the workplace. Adequate employment tracking data would provide critical feedback as to whether students are successful and being promoted in the workforce.

Keys to Replication:

The TRAC-7 Consortium advises a strong engagement program between the students and the employers.

Establishing an active advisory board and bringing Human Resources and Training Managers into the planning and hiring phases of the program are key strategies for success. There has to be a constant reevaluation of the programs offered – the continuous interaction and evaluation of the skills that students are taught should match those skills sought in the workforce.

Another key to replication is the integration with the local Workforce Centers to bring resources closer to the students.

Job placement strategies and training are essential to ensure that the students not only have the technical skills needed, but also the interpersonal skills required to land and keep a job.

There is a need for continued investment in technology.

Technological investments ensure that students are gaining hands-on learning experiences on the same state-of-the-art equipment that
they will find in the workplace. This is critical for students to become employable at the commencement of the program.