Recruitment Strategies

Case Study Report

Iowa-Advanced Manufacturing (I-AM): A Talent Success Strategy for the 21st Century Workforce

Des Moines Area Community College
Ankeny, Iowa

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Program Overview:
The Iowa-Advance Manufacturing (I-AM) consortium is comprised of 15 Iowa community colleges distributed across the state. The consortium works collaboratively with the Iowa Association of Business & Industry (ABI), and the private manufacturing sector throughout the State of Iowa to create a steady pipeline of skilled workers for Iowa’s in-demand, advanced manufacturing occupations. Together, they built training capacity by developing and awarding non-credit and credit certificates, diplomas, and associate’s degrees in their signature programs areas: welding, machining, industrial maintenance, industrial automation, manufacturing technology, robotics, and transportation and logistics.

Their stacked and latticed curricula align with third-party certifications, including the NCRC™, AWS, NIMS, and MSSC, which are part of the National Association of Manufacturer’s endorsed Skills Certification System, and provide clear career pathways for students. I-AM improved collaboration and alignment between community college programs, the Iowa’s workforce system, and targeted industry partners to keep and create high quality jobs in Iowa. To date, over 3,000 individuals have had the opportunity to earn college credentials and industry-recognized certifications in a shortened time frame, making them eligible for high demand, high wage employment opportunities.

Consortium Members:
Eastern Iowa Community College (Davenport); Hawkeye Community College (Waterloo); Iowa Central Community College (Fort Dodge); Indian Hills Community College (Ottumwa); Iowa Lakes Community College (Estherville); Iowa Valley Community College (Marshalltown); Iowa Western Community College (Council Bluffs); Kirkwood Community College (Cedar Rapids); North Iowa Area Community College (Mason City); Northeast Iowa Community College (Calmar); Northwest Iowa Community College (Sheldon); Southeastern Community College (West Burlington); Southwestern Community College (Creston); Western Iowa Tech Community College (Sioux City).

Key Partners:

I-AM Consortium Highlights:
Type of Grant: Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program
Industry Focus: Advanced Manufacturing
Period of Performance: 10/1/2012-09/30/2016
Grant Amount Awarded: $12,951,165
Leveraged Resources: IT staff, WITCC faculty & staff training
Identifying and Overcoming Challenges

Initial Challenge: Overcoming Negative Perceptions
Many Iowa residents have an antiquated view of manufacturing and do not realize the job opportunities available in the sector. Outdated perceptions fostered a lack of interest in these careers and, ultimately, created a skills gap within Iowa’s Manufacturing sector.

Overcoming the Challenge: Get Involved in the Community
The I-AM management team created a public outreach program to combat perceptions of the manufacturing industry and to support recruitment efforts. The marketing campaign highlighted cutting edge products produced in Iowa, the highly-advanced equipment used within the sector, and the attractive pay and benefit packages available to its employees.

To build the case for investing in training and education through their signature programs, the I-AM team developed a very comprehensive and user-friendly website. They employed statewide radio, social media, including: Facebook, Twitter, and Google Ads, and printed materials for potential students. The consortium conducted career and training fairs, veterans’ job fairs, and even exhibited at the Iowa state fair. I-AM also engaged regional partnerships with workforce to communicate the benefits of their programs.

Initial Challenge: Connecting Students to the Right I-AM Career Pathway
The traditional college schedule presents challenges for some adults seeking to re-enter the educational sphere. Additionally, job seekers transitioning to manufacturing from other industries were in need of further guidance to choose the best possible career pathway.

Overcoming the Challenge:
The consortium created ElevateIowa.com which hosts statewide training, select program information and important details about the signature program career pathways including skills, work styles, and median salaries. The website also features a self-assessment tool that allows visitors to answer questions that may lead them to a career that might be a good personal fit. The website offers video testimonials from those who work in the industry and current job listings from Iowa’s workforce development office. To better accommodate those students who would needed to continue working while furthering their education, some I-AM schools offered online courses. The combined use of these strategies has greatly improved recruitment rates for the I-AM consortium.

Initial Challenge: Coordinating with Statewide Workforce to Access the TAA-Eligible Applicant Pool
Because Iowa has consistently low unemployment rates relative to national averages, it was difficult to recruit a large enough pool of TAA impacted individuals to satisfy grant requirements.

Overcoming the Challenge:
State and regional workforce agencies have access to information about TAA impacted workers and other target populations that is not typically
available to college administrators. However, many of the colleges within the I-AM consortium had existing relationships with their local workforce agencies and were able to overcome this barrier. The I-AM consortium pathway navigator, whose job was to deliver “high intensity” advising — from recruitment and enrollment through graduation and job placement assistance — worked with local workforce agencies to educate workforce staff on the career opportunities available through I-AM to Iowa’s TAA impacted workers. I-AM colleges also built upon local and regional workforce relationships to build new bridges with the statewide agencies. These various relationships at the regional and state level has created a web of parties that assist with the recruitment of TAA eligible individuals.

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

Activity: I-AM Project Interaction with the Community
The sustainability of the program was one of the consortium’s most prominent goals before the grant program was even initiated. Through a partnership with the statewide business association, the colleges launched an outreach program to ameliorate attitudes towards manufacturing and increase awareness in the community of the programs offered at their local colleges.

Because of their commitment to program sustainability, the campaign will continue long after the TAACCCT grant ends. Through key partner relationships, the programs reach an audience beyond that of TAA-eligible students. For example, the American Welding Society partnered with the consortium to provide welding simulators to be used by potential students during recruitment events and outreach sessions to raise awareness about the types of positions available in manufacturing and the nature of the work. This hands-on experience helped to generate foot traffic at recruitment events and provided program counselors an educational tool far more interesting than any hand-out or flier they could have generated.

Activity: Digital Outreach
Informing the general public and individual communities about the availability of manufacturing jobs and the value of a vocational degree was not an easy task. Statewide branding and consistent outreach messaging were integral to developing a successful grant program, particularly with respect to digital media.

The Elevate Iowa website, www.ElevateIowa.com, became the face of the outreach campaign. The site serves as the centralized location for all educational materials, employment information, and videos about I-AM programs. It was designed for the general public and for potential grantees to learn about the various vocational paths. Having one location to send all interested parties, students and industry partners alike, streamlined I-AM’s ability to share a consistent message across colleges.

Interview with Stephanie Ferraro
Project Director
I-AM Project,
Iowa-Advanced Manufacturing Consortium

Q: Did you require any external assistance while setting up your grant programs in the beginning?
A: Well, we had trouble initially with recruitment on a statewide level so we looked for outside assistance to help increase our recruitment numbers.

We hired Susan Metheny as our official recruitment manager to assist with recruitment efforts.

Having one person whose main goal was to focus on recruitment, as opposed to tasking a consortium lead who was already working on other facets of the grant project, has made all the difference.

Susan has done quite a lot for the consortium and really evolved the statewide recruitment structure for I-AM. Based off of the successes we have experienced in Clackamas, we highly recommend hiring someone with recruitment expertise to focus on managing the recruitment of students for grant programs.
**Activity: Communication between Colleges**

Establishing a strong support base and solid coordination amongst all 15 Iowa colleges was a major goal of the consortium. When managing such a large consortium, efficient communication methods are crucial. The consortium required frequent communication between management teams and college faculty and staff. Several weekly and bi-weekly meetings were required. At these meetings, it was encouraged that all representatives share successes and challenges that they faced throughout the grant program to communally work towards improvements and discuss areas of focus. Remember to always evaluate the recruitment strategy during consortium meetings to ensure that staff members are using the most effective methods to recruit the largest number of candidates.

**Key Lessons Learned:**

**Highlight Industry Partnerships in Recruiting Efforts**

From its inception, I-AM collaborated with employers to develop curriculum and create career pathways founded on industry standards and requirements. They involved industry boards and hosted advisory committees within each college and at the consortium management level. The results were a stacked and latticed curriculum and a consistent message from both school and industry – that I-AM programs provide the skills-needed to become employed in Iowa’s manufacturing industry. This unified effort bolstered recruitment and underscored the benefits of investing in training.

**Securing Funding Beyond Grant Resources**

A critical part of recruitment is counseling potential students on the funding available to help them stay in school and finish a program. Because TAACCCT grant monies could not be used to support some students, project leads were tasked to find alternative methods of funding to create a larger base. The consortium was always trying to effectively navigate the allocation of resources to produce the greatest results for I-AM program recruitment and retention. Local workforce agencies and consortium pathway navigators were key to this effort.

**Building relationships with statewide business associations and with private business bolsters the college’s vocational programming and the longevity of the grant program**

**Strategies for Sustainability:**

**Strategy 1: Partnering with the Statewide Business Association(s) and Businesses**

Through its statewide business associations, the consortium had an external network simultaneously pursuing the goals of the grant program and assisting with recruitment. These affiliated groups became invested in the mission of the program and, by extension, the future of the industry as a whole. For example, the Iowa Association of Business and Industry became so excited by the I-AM initiative that they established and promoted a K-12 education and outreach program that aligns with the message of I-AM to generate excitement for this type of manufacturing in future workforce generations. Public and private business partnerships supported program efforts by participating in events to increase student enrollment and emphasize vocational education as a viable training option.

**Strategy 2: Creating Non-credit to Credit Pathways**

DOL ETA TAACCCT
taa.cct@dol.gov/ www.doleta.gov/taaccct/
The consortium colleges aligned non-credit to credit programs to broaden students’ options. Students who begin in non-credit training can easily switch to credit programs or choose to return to school once employed to further their education. Students can be recruited for job-specific training and counseled once enrolled on the benefits of using the career pathways model to obtain the certification and/or degrees necessary to transition to higher-paying, managerial work.

**Strategy 3: Leverage Relationships with Workforce**
Home Base Iowa is a statewide government initiative and law that will help match veterans with well-paying, high quality jobs in the manufacturing sector. Having state government legislation that promotes the consortium’s programs brings awareness to the I-AM program.

**Keys to Replication:**

**Focus on sustaining the outreach programs**
The consortium partnered with the statewide business associations to focus on the long-term goals and sustainability of the I-AM project. A major goal of the public campaign was to recruit associations and businesses that can carry on outreach efforts after the I-AM program’s TAACCCT grant funds expire. Build stackable credentials and align credit and non-credit programs so that program completers have ongoing training and career advancement options.

**Work to alter public perception**
Build a positive perception of Advanced Manufacturing careers through an educational marketing campaign that will encourage displaced workers, veterans, and high school students to consider careers in Advanced Manufacturing. Look for influential connections outside of industry and workforce. By coordinating with the governor’s office and aligning initiative goals with to current statewide goals of job creation, I-AM was able to gain high profile exposure in the media. Iowa’s governor routinely endorsed the ElevateIowa.com in public addresses and helped provide legislative assistance to recruit students into vocational fields.

**Develop a statewide marketing initiative to be used across various platforms.**
The consortium management team sought to ensure that every staff member, college faculty, recruitment personnel, and federal employee involved in the program used the same campaign message for outreach activities and recruitment. Program leads agreed that using one message across all fields was more beneficial as enrollment numbers grew. It was also the most effective way to successfully target and combat negative perceptions that the public had about manufacturing jobs and vocational degrees.