Sandhills Community College

Situs and Sandhills Community College

The business model developed by Situs for its Robbins location is unique. The concept was to take some of the commercial real estate analysis and support functions that were typically established at offshore locations and bring them back onshore to a rural America setting. The innovation/best practice involved Sandhills Community College assisting Situs with the initial training of new hires to provide the skills they need to be able to be effective in their jobs. The college continues to support Situs with curriculum, continuing education, and Customized Training programs to provide skills enhancement for their current workforce and to train prospective new employees for the job opportunities at the company.

DETAILS

Situs elected to locate a commercial real estate analysis start-up in rural North Carolina in the town of Robbins. The area is economically distressed as a result of the loss of several large textile manufacturers. While there is a significantly large pool of potential employees, most do not have the skill sets needed by Situs to perform the jobs adequately and to be productive.

The first challenge was to provide an effective training program that would train the newly hired employees in the skills they needed to be productive for Situs. Situs and the college worked with the Situs training product labelled “Situs U” to create a formal training plan that included the “Situs U” elements supplemented and enhanced with additional training needs as identified by Situs or recommended by the college. The college assisted in providing both the “Situs U” and the supplemental training. Situs also recognized that they would need to provide a pathway for future employees and they partnered with the college’s Management and Business Technology department to create a commercial banking course to help with that training.

As their business model changed and evolved, a need for enhanced employee skills became evident in order to compete for higher level analysis contracts. As part of the college’s ongoing mission to support the company and its growth, Sandhills worked with Situs to revise the “Situs U” training program providing an enhanced training program designed to deliver the upgraded skills. This training program is the training platform currently used by the Situs Robbins location. In addition, the college’s curriculum program enhanced their program offerings to include a new Banking and Finance certificate program in the Business and Management Technology department aimed at commercial real estate analysis and developed with input from Situs. This program is not only applicable to Situs’ employees but is also useful and relevant to employees and prospective employees of the general banking community.

Situs provides reimbursement for educational expenses for their current employees to pursue this program at Sandhills and provides internship opportunities to students in the Sandhills program. Sandhills Community College continues to provide curriculum, continuing education, and
Customized Training Program resources to assist Situs in their training needs and to support their continued growth.

Implementation began in October 2006.

**Partner Type(s):**
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)

**Impact/Outcomes**

Training is critical to the success of Situs since their product is service based and depends on employee knowledge and application skills. Through the college partnership, Situs provides skills training at the highest level for new and existing employees and has been able to significantly enhance the skill levels of their employees. Over the course of the partnership, Sandhills assisted Situs with training 138 employees (this number is a duplicated number and includes terminating employees and their replacements).

Situs initial startup created 37 new jobs in an economically distressed area. They have since grown to 85 employees creating good paying jobs in a rural environment.

The college created a new curriculum certificate program in Banking and Finance that prepares students for jobs at both Situs and the other banking institutions in our area providing trained and qualified workers for those businesses.

Situs provides internships for students in the Management and Business Technology department, their employees pursue both certificate and degree programs at Sandhills Community College, and Situs recently partially funded a curriculum position in the Management and Business Technology department.

Situs, Sandhills Community College, and the Moore County K-12 School System are now exploring ways to create an apprenticeship program through the public schools as a result of lessons learned from the Summit presentations.

**Funding Source(s)**
Customized Training Program
- First project funding: $38,733
- Second project funding: $44,889
- Third project funding: $37,748

(This project just underway and funding is estimated)

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**REFLECTIONS**

**Innovation or Best Practice**
This program represents an effective partnership between the company, the Sandhills Community College curriculum program, the NCCCS Customized Training Program, and the Division of Continuing Education at Sandhills. It has provided training specifically addressing the needs of the local business which has assisted them with growing and creating new employment opportunities for our area. It has generated a new curriculum program that will provide knowledgeable and trained employees for the local company as well as the general banking sector.

**Lessons Learned**
- The importance and benefits of a comprehensive approach to assisting a local employer with their training and employee search needs
• The importance of assisting a local start-up in becoming established and assisting them with their growth creating new employment opportunities

**Scalability**
The original intent of this initiative from its founders was to provide a model for other companies to use in creating this type of business operation in a rural United States setting. As was proven by the Situs Robbins operation, this model can be successful with the cooperation and partnership of the local economic development agency, the community, and the educational institutions in the area. It can provide much needed jobs for rural locations in North Carolina.

**RESOURCES**

**Workforce Learning Summit Presenters**
Nicole Bozich, Partner, Situs Companies
Alan Duncan, Associate Dean of Continuing Education, Sandhills Community College
Director, Business and Industry Services, Sandhills Community College
Kirk Lynch, Department Chair, Mgmt. and Business Technologies, Sandhills Community College

**For Further Information**
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