Workforce Learning Summit Innovation or Best Practice

Wayne Community College

WORKS: A Model Approach for a Work-Ready Community

The mission of the WORKS (Wayne Occupational Readiness Keys for Success) Initiative is to develop and market a skilled workforce for Wayne County by facilitating communications and collaboration between stakeholders, assessing workforce needs/gaps, supporting local, regional and state initiatives, and securing adequate workforce development funding. By bringing together the key stakeholders in economic and workforce development in the county, WORKS creates an innovative approach to building a skilled workforce. This partnership facilitates the integration of WORKS into all arenas (government, chamber, public schools, community college, economic development, business and industry, etc.). The result is a work-ready Wayne County and a model for replication in other communities.

DETAILS

In May 2006, a group of Wayne County professionals involved in economic and workforce development began a series of conversations about the quality of the local workforce and the problems facing employers in the county. Using their established relationships with local employers and human resource professionals, this group conducted meetings and surveys to prepare a needs assessment detailing the specific workforce development issues of the county. What they found was that Wayne County employers face similar challenges that can be summed up in this way: “A gap exists between the skills required in today’s workplace and those exhibited by potential and incumbent employees. Employers in Wayne County have trouble locating and hiring people with fundamental, trainable skills. Businesses need new employees who can achieve job proficiency quickly in order to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive global economy.”

Shortly thereafter, a working board was formed that included industry leaders, the President of Wayne Community College, the Superintendent of Wayne County Public Schools, the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce, the Manager of the Employment Security Commission/JobLink, the Existing Industry Specialist from the Wayne County Development Alliance, and the Assistant City Manager of Goldsboro. The group conducted a needs assessment, defined the mission and goals, established an advisory board and steering committee, and secured the backing of county officials. A Workforce Development Coordinator and part-time staff assistant were hired to carry out the mission of Wayne Occupational Readiness Keys for Success (WORKS).

What makes WORKS unique is that this initiative links workforce development with education, and aligns itself with the economic needs of Wayne County. What makes this initiative possible is the established partnership between business and industry, government representatives in economic and workforce development, and leaders in education at the high school and college levels in Wayne County. The support of the Wayne County Human Resource Professionals Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the business and industry leaders is crucial to the success of WORKS. Their ability and willingness to facilitate the integration of WORKS in the business community and represent decision-makers in that realm ensures the initiative’s success.
The goal of WORKS is to create and market a skilled workforce that will compliment Wayne County’s current and future workforce and economic development needs. High growth industries, such as health care, life science, and advanced manufacturing offer job opportunities that provide higher than average earnings; however, these employers often experience difficulty finding and keeping highly qualified workers. WORKS seeks to address the skills gaps of the current and future workforce, and to improve the quality of the talent pool by emphasizing the knowledge and skill-based requirements of today’s workplace. “HOW” does WORKS accomplish this? WORKS coordinates Career Readiness Credentials (CRCs) in Wayne County; it offers job and curriculum profiling; it provides customized training in soft skills/employability skills as well as other specialized training for business and industry; it seeks funding for sustainability; and it coordinates a network of partners through its common mission.

WORKS creates a process for developing a documented workforce pipeline whose skill level is measurable and can be matched to occupation or job profiles conducted to identify necessary workplace skills. The WORKS goal of creating and marketing a skilled workforce is another way of saying that WORKS seeks to identify Wayne County as a work-ready community.


Partner Type(s):
- Business/Industry (direct involvement)
- Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board
- Career Center
- Public Schools
- Nonprofit organization(s)
- Other: Chamber of Commerce, Seymour Johnson AFB, County of Wayne

Impact/Outcomes
Wayne County has led the state in the number of Career Readiness Certificates (CRCs) earned – 13,450 (7/29/14 data), which translates to nearly 25% of its workforce.
In 2014, 45% of Wayne CC graduates had earned a CRC by graduation.
Public school students take CRC in 11th grade
28 employers in the county ask for the CRC when hiring
30 Profiles have been conducted (job and curriculum profiles)
Soft Skills Initiative – Rubric developed and added to syllabi in all curriculum programs by Spring 2015
The WORKS Initiative was used as a model for the NCER/CFED/ECWDB pilot WorkReady Communities Initiative. Wayne County was the first county to be designated a Certified WorkReady Community.

Funding Source(s)
The WORKS Initiative was, and continues to be, largely county-funded. Since 2007-2008, the County of Wayne has appropriated over $1 million to the WORKS Initiative. Additional funding from grants from diverse sources for numerous WORKS-related projects have totaled $407,000. Wayne Community College provides a “home” for the initiative in its Business and Industry Center and financially supports many WORKS initiatives through its related programs and activities.
REFLECTIONS

Innovation or Best Practice
The test of a best practice is that it works in the real world. WORKS began with a group of local professionals from different agencies who believed that something not only needed to be done but could be done about the identifiable issues facing the workforce. WORKS gave a single voice and a common language to the strategies developed around its mission. As time goes on, WORKS continues to evolve and to initiate new strategies, but the mission is always the same.

Lessons Learned
1. Engage employers and other partners early and often.
2. Continuous improvement applies.
3. There is no “Finish Line.”
4. Sometimes the toughest customers are your own “family.”

Scalability
WORKS has proven to be a scalable strategy for economic and workforce development. Although it began as an idea in a single county, the WORKS model was expanded to 13 counties in Eastern NC through the ASPIRE Alliance. Using the strategies of WORKS, ASPIRE sought to mentor other counties as they created similar initiatives in their own communities. Thirteen counties, 11 community colleges and 2 Workforce Development Boards participated in the ASPIRE Alliance. Furthermore, WORKS was the model for NC's Eastern Region pilot WorkReady Communities Initiative. To date five counties previously served by NC's Eastern Region have achieved WRC status. Outside the 13-county region, another community in the East (Beaufort County) and a community in Western NC have joined the pilot initiative.

RESOURCES

Workforce Learning Summit Presenters
Dr. Kay Albertson, President, Wayne Community College
Mike Haney, Existing Industry Specialist and Vice President, Wayne County Development Alliance
Diane Ivey, Executive Director, Wayne Business & Industry Center, Wayne Community College

Website link
http://www.wayneworksnc.com/works/

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