

XIX. STAFF AND PARTNER TRAINING

Professional development and ongoing training for front-line staff, case managers, and unit administrators are widely recognized as critical to providing effective customer service, referrals, and follow-through. While training activities across the Union County workforce system have taken place around various areas of need in various settings, they have been commonly held in reaction to changes in regulation rather than proactively as a means for enhancing communication, coordination, and collaboration, as well as for the deliberate purpose of improving skills and knowledge of those involved. Embarking on the latter, more systematically than has previously been the case, has been identified as a strategic priority for the American Job Center to pursue over its next phase of development.

Recent Training Sessions

As stated earlier, a comprehensive training program was instituted over the last three years and a number of trainings completed, including:

Front-Line Worker Professional Development

2018 -2019 Case Manager to Career Coach" workshops: (Workshops)

AJC Staff and ACJ Partner staff attended 5 half-day workshops

- Customer Service
- Motivational Interviewing
- Career Pathways
- Stackable Credentials
- Co-enrollment

AJC Partner Engagement

2018-2019 Identifying and Strengthening Partner Responsibilities: (Workshops)

AJC Staff and ACJ Partner staff attended 3 half-day workshops

- Mapping Workforce Partners and Systems
- Gap Analysis
- Enhancing the Role of Partner Members

Sub-Committee Engagement: (Workshops)

WDB Sub-Committee members and AJC/WDB Administrative Staff attended a number of workshops and meetings around the following topics:

- Expanding services supporting youth, literacy and partner engagement
- One-Stop Operator procurement process consultation
- Advancing system-wide process and services improvement

WIOA Staff Development Training

- 2015: Three-day training for County and Employment Services staff on WIOA changes, covering particularly WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated, and WIOA Youth programming.

- 2016: Inter-office training by County staff and Employment Services staff (all staff and volunteers from every department and agency) to review as a group the diversity of programs and staff roles, followed by a joint effort for several months to develop a Resource Book in which every program being held at the American Job Center building has been introduced and described.
- 2016 Training for Career Connections for County staff, Employment Services staff, and Union County College staff.
- 2016 Meeting of a select group of County and Employment Services staff with staff from Social Services to train them in the WIOA changes that impact WFNJ Performances. (More sessions will be held in the upcoming months as changes take effect.)

Strategic Directions

In an effort to raise the effectiveness of serving customers and engaging with partnering entities, be they vendors or other service agencies, the following strategies will be adopted, along with a set of supportive activities, in order to meet the second objective of instituting greater quality of service and facilitating a work culture of responsiveness, competency, engagement, and vigor.

S-32. Make an adequate investment in professional development and timely, pertinent training for American Job Center staff, vendors, and community agencies. (Aligned with Goal 4-Expanded Access and with Goal 5-Employer Engagement)

- For the American Job Center and Board Staff:
 - Quarterly staff meetings will be instituted to allow for the significant flow of information, policy updates, cross-training, consistency of procedures and service activities, and use of data reports to understand and improve performance.
 - The training program will pay special attention to case workers and career coaches, who will be encouraged to attend on-site and off-site professional-skills training to (a) keep them abreast of best practices and trends in the field; (b) encourage a tradition of continuous learning, especially vis-à-vis professional standards; and (c) invigorate their overall professional disposition.
 - Managers will be invited to participate in extensive process-improvement training and receive appropriate credentials. Training in Six Sigma, or similar models, will be considered.
 - Occasional professional presentations will be organized with a guest presented on important areas of case management, workforce industry-specific training needs, career and employment support, and use of technology.

Identified Areas of Need for Staff/Manager Training

Front-Line Staff: How to deal with diverse customers and with difficult customers

Management: Developing bidding requests; Workforce issues; Conflict resolution

All: Latest Labor Market Data & Trends; Computer & online technology; Performance indicators

- Training for WDB Board Members:
 - New Board members will receive their Board Handbook and will meet with WDB Chair and WDB Executive Director for initial orientation and training.

- Training for Sub-Recipient and Vendors:
 - Extensive orientations will be held for new sub-recipients and vendors, which will focus on process and, far beyond, on the purpose of their engagement and anticipated quality of the training and trainees' experience.
 - Frequent and formal conversations with sub-recipients and vendors will be hosted to help align expectations and interpretation of performance measures, as well as provide sub-recipients and vendors with enhanced customer service and overall improvement of training—such opportunities for improvement are not commonly available among training schools and institutes.
 - Interactions with vendors will be built with the intent to establish a collaborative environment between them and the American Job Center, working toward a common goal of training customers effectively for jobs and long-term employment. In such an environment, the County and vendors will work more like partners in a mutually supportive arrangement.

Identified Areas of Need for Vendor Training

Enrollment Management: Improving student retention by providing individualized attention and helping students build self-initiative and personal responsibility

Trainee Interactions: How to deal with difficult students, how to read early signs of disengagement, and how to inspire and support students falling behind or disengaged students.

- Training for community agencies: Significant efforts will be made to strengthen working relations with community agencies, especially those that are offering

similar services to their constituents, e.g., on-site training or employment services. Specifically,

- A forum will be organized annually around a given workforce theme of general interest to the broader community in which select agencies will be invited to participate. This will, as an indirect benefit, increase the workforce system's exposure and help position it as a critical resource for the community.
- Subject matter experts and seasoned service professionals from the American Job Center will offer their services to community agencies, as a sign of community engagement in a number of areas, among them: case management, training referrals, educational screening.
- Participate, and take a leadership role where appropriate, with community partners to participate in campaigns around important regional issues from public health to workplace safety.

Progress Update

As noted in the summary of training above, the Union County Workforce Development Board has prioritized staff/partner development and authorized significant resources to assist in strengthening our workforce community.