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Workforce Training Programs

Workforce Training Programs

By Kathleen Moriarty

1. What is a workforce training program, and what are its goals?



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Workforce training programs are typically community sponsored organizations whose primary goals are to assist (1) community members in gaining employment and (2) employers in finding qualified workers. Organizations that focus on workforce training needs make every effort to be “one stop” shops: they bring together employers, employees and training programs to maximize communication and efficiency. Many of the partner organizations also provide GED preparation and assistance in seeking higher education opportunities including college application assistance and vocational education opportunities.

2. What populations do workforce training programs serve?

Workforce training programs offer help to both employers and employees. Employers typically include technology related businesses – either there is a need for new and uniquely skilled workers as a result of new technology or there is a need to keep up with the changes in current technology. Employees are either employed and seeking assistance in improving their skills and making more money (or at least not losing their job) or they are unemployed and looking to gain the skills necessary for employment. Workforce training programs often reach out to populations that are typically unemployed: veterans, the elderly, individuals that did not graduate from high school, and persons moving from welfare to work.

3. Who funds workforce training in Buffalo and Erie County?

Funding is provided at every level of government: city, county, state and federal. Federal funding is provided through the Workforce Investment Act; the Workforce Investment Board administers these funds in Buffalo and Erie County to employers who need assistance providing on-the-job training to their employees. The State Department of Labor has monies available for businesses that are in jeopardy of losing employees due to layoffs. In conjunction with the State Department of Labor, Empire State Development administers the Strategic Alliance Program (STRAP) in Western New York. STRAP is unique in that it was created to meet more specialized needs of employers to ensure a highly skilled current and future workforce. Other workforce training organizations are funded separately; for instance, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFLCIO) funds the Western New York Workforce Development Center.

4. **What is the Workforce Investment Board?**

The Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board is a semi-governmental agency set up through the Workforce Investment Act. The Board facilitates the oversight of funds that are ultimately distributed by the Workforce Development Consortium. The Board is responsible for allocating \$17.8 million in grants to employers and for benefiting 19,000 workers at 155 businesses. ¹

5. **What organizations actually provide workforce training in Buffalo and Erie County and what specific training do these agencies offer?**

The Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium is the umbrella that distributes the money to “one-stop” agencies such as Buffalo Employment and Training Center (BETC) and Erie Community College Employment and Training Center (ECC) that actually provide the services to employees and employers. BETC and ECC offer the following services:

For Employees:

- *Employment Workshops:* Email and Internet Job Hunting, Computer Skills (Word Processing, Excel, PowerPoint, Access), Interview Techniques, Career Planning, Job-Finding Tips, Resume and Cover Letter Writing and Review, Surviving Unemployment.
- *Career Planning:* BETC and ECC help clients assess current skills, education level, talents and skills with job opportunities in the area. These agencies inform potential employees of employer expectations, and what to expect in the way of wage and salary. The goal is to provide an employee with a realistic picture of the job market and how he or she fits into that picture.
- *Education and Training:* To start, workforce training programs assess an individual's skills, and provide GED training and upgraded math and reading skills. Workers already employed and in need of additional skills to stay competitive are guided in more specialized training. Clients who wish to go back to school receive assistance in applying for financial aid, and are often eligible for free child care and financial assistance to pay for meals and transportation.
- *Job Search Resources:* Potential employees have access to the news publications, internet, copiers, fax machines and telephones for job related purposes. Individuals also have the opportunity to meet with staff for one on one consultations and with currently hiring employers.
- *Military Transition:* Training agencies offer specialized assistance to veterans and returning military personnel. Often these additional services include resources for injured and disabled individuals, matching military experience to civilian jobs, and personal help to veterans and their families during the transition to civilian life.
- *Interpersonal Skills:* ECC and BETC help employees to understand the “soft skills” involved in getting and keeping a job. Employees are taught to anticipate

¹ Workforce Investment Board helps some, angers others. *Buffalo News*, November 28, 2005.

and to negotiate what can be a stressful experience of dealing with difficult supervisors and fellow employees.

For Employers:

- *Job Matching:* Employers have access to a database of qualified workers with ranging experience levels, and employers have the option to test an applicant's skill level to ensure a good fit between employer and employee.



- *On-site Interviews:* Agencies encourage employers to make presentations at the agency and then to allow time for on-site interviews following the presentation. This process is time efficient and eliminates the discouragement of an improper match.

- *On-the-Job Training:* Employers are eligible for funding through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) to provide on-the-job training to an employee. In exchange for the cost of training the employee, the employer is reimbursed for half of the employee's training wages.
- *Customized Training:* Employers who need to train an employee (new or current) in a very specific field are also eligible for a 50% reduction in the cost of training that employee (new or current). Employers are then committed to employ, or continue to employ, the employee when the training is completed.
- *Layoff Aversion Program:* The Department of Labor funds businesses that are in jeopardy of losing employees or closing. Employers in these situations are assisted in evaluating their work force to determine whether any retraining or upgraded training might help. Employers are also encouraged to utilize Employee Stock Ownership Plans and Shared Work Programs.
- *Strategic Training Alliance Program (STRAP):* The Empire State Development and the New York State Department of Labor implemented STRAP in 2000 to identify worker shortages in certain industries or specific businesses and to promote skills upgrading for high technology jobs. STRAP is structured to provide New York State businesses with a long-term work force of qualified employees that can compete and adapt in a dynamic job market.

6. **What types of employment do workforce training programs address?**

Training programs typically focus on skilled labor, but not necessarily labor that



requires college or graduate level education, though certain fields of employment might require a certification or a license. Fields include bookkeeping, accounting, computer specialists, dental hygienists, customer service representatives, lab technicians, nursing, health information technicians, physical therapists, social and human services assistants, welders, cutters, auto mechanics, refrigeration mechanics and heating and air conditioning installers.

7. **What are some examples of local companies using workforce training programs?**



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ZeptoMetrix Corp, a biotechnology manufacturer that grows viruses such as HIV and West Nile for use by universities and research institutes, used local workforce training programs to hire six employees. The employees that ZeptoMetrix hired had basic lab skills and four year biology degrees but needed specialized training.²

In October 2007, Command Security Corp. of Poughkeepsie was offered a contract with HSBC Bank to open an

office in Cheektowaga, NY. The security firm needed about 30 employees, so the agency looked to the BETC. BETC held a breakfast interview with over 20 qualified employees and Command Security Corp. Command was very happy with the turn out and ultimately hired many of the potential employees with BETC.³

Funding through the Workforce Investment Act helped provide 50% of the cost to provide on-the-job training to new employees when GEICO opened its office in Amherst, NY. The Erie County Legislature approved \$200,000 to match the training funds that had already been sponsored by the Workforce Investment Board.⁴

² Workforce Investment Board helps some, angers others. *Buffalo News*, November 28, 2005.

³ Helping Fill the Jobs, *Buffalo First*, October 12, 2007.

⁴ http://www.erie.gov/legislature/democrat_news042304.asp.

8. **Are local workforce programs training workers for green collar jobs?**

Western New York has the potential to benefit tremendously from “green collar jobs,” but WNY workers are not typically trained in these industries and businesses: wind power, ethanol production, solar panel construction and installation, retrofitting, and deconstruction. Workforce training programs are not currently meeting these needs, and maybe that’s because the need isn’t quite demanded yet, so the struggle is that, although you can’t have the business without the workers, you won’t have the workers unless there is a business in which they can work. Ideally, workforce training programs will work with businesses looking to locate in WNY to address both needs.

California is actively pursuing the “green collar” job market. California’s Workforce Investment Board developed a website, which is fully dedicated to a “Green” Analysis. The site outlines what it means to be “green,” what kind of industries is green and what occupations are green. It is a wealth of resources – including information about upcoming conferences and summits, legislation, green job activities by state (New York is not listed), and other related resources.⁵

9. **What can be being done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce training programs?**

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership (BNP) has requested that the WIB keep track of the amount of money it spends on each individual for training and employment preparation as well as tracking the individual’s ultimate area of employment. BNP also hopes that a larger, specified amount of money be spent on specialized training where hiring potential is the greatest.⁶

⁵ California’s Workforce Investment Board, <http://www.calwia.org/>

⁶ WIB Should Track Public Spending. *Business First*, November 25, 2005.