

Abstract
Workforce Innovation Fund Grant Application

Applicant Name: Metro North Regional Employment Board

Applicant Category: Individual WIB

Lead Applicant City/ State: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Areas Served: The Metro North REB serves 20 communities located adjacent to and North of Boston. CONNECT's facility is located in Chelsea, and is expected to serve low-wage, lesser-skilled and unemployed clients drawing from Chelsea, Revere, Everett and surrounding communities that demonstrate the highest needs within the Metro North WIA area.

Project Name: CONNECT - Bundles and Co-locates One-Stop Career Center, ESOL, Training, Financial, Housing, and Other Support Services in a Multi-Party Collaboration to Deliver Effective, Efficient Services that Promote Economic Self-Sufficiency of Those Most in Need

Funding Level Requested: \$2,400,000 for Technical Costs; \$600,000 for Evaluation Costs

Project Type: A, New and Untested Ideas

Description of Proposed Project:

CONNECT is a partnership of six well regarded organizations who have come together in Chelsea Massachusetts to co-locate and bundle complementary services to increase the impact of those services on the employment, educational and financial outcomes of low-wage and lesser-skilled workers, limited English and lesser educated workers, and the unemployed. Joanne Goldstein, Massachusetts Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development described CONNECT as "the direction we all need to go in" noting that "single stand alone programs can't move a family out of poverty." A Workforce Innovation Fund grant will enable CONNECT to closely align and integrate workforce development, education and human services to more effectively and efficiently achieve better results for vulnerable job seekers and employers.

Many of the innovative components of CONNECT are associated with its effort to work across a number of different systems.

1. CONNECT's unique collaborative structure is untested and supports a highly flexible and adaptive program that allows for a broader array of services than those typically offered at a One Stop Career Center or at any of the individual partnering agencies. This collaborative structure and the inclusion of housing stabilization services (supported by HUD funding) are CONNECT innovations.
2. The program leverages funding from more than 16 public federal and state funding streams through its partners allowing for cost-efficient and braided service delivery. The partners are integrating their respective services and working together on shared outcome goals to increase the effectiveness of service delivery and the economic outcomes of our clients.
3. CONNECT incorporates the use of social networks to support client success. CONNECT participants have the opportunity to be a part of unusual peer support Success Teams

which serve to build motivation and expand an individual's network, ambitions and a sense of what's possible.

Research commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation of three Centers for Working Families (CFW) was among the studies that informed the development of the CONNECT model. The CFW model bundles and sequences employment, financial coaching and public benefits screening. Financial coaching - which CONNECT has adopted as a strategy - emerged as a critical program component as it was found to support client progress against action plans and to encourage investment in behavior changes that support success. The 2010 Abt Associates report of CFW programming includes this key finding: "Clients who receive bundled services are three to four times more likely to achieve a major economic outcome (such as staying employed, earning a vocational certification or associate's degree or buying a car) than clients receiving only one type of service." Additional research summarized in *Job Training that Works*, concludes that "officials at the federal, state and local levels should find ways to make more flexible funding available to organizations that offer [a] range of services and/or make it easier for individuals and organizations to navigate existing systems and funding streams."

The United Way of Massachusetts Bay & Merrimack Valley provided a planning grant to support CONNECT's business and program development. The program officially launched in January, 2012 when each of the six partners began to co-locate and integrate their services. The program places significant emphasis on helping participants improve their educational credentials so that they are prepared for certificate training programs or associate degrees leading to family-sustaining employment. ESOL, ABE, Transitions to College, Career Pathways, and training contextualized for computer tech and allied health sectors are among the services supported by CONNECT. To complement this skill building are wrap-around supports to help clients succeed at school and to retain employment. A MOU outlines service delivery benchmarks and a shared work plan; the CONNECT partners include:

- **Career Source**— chartered by the Metro North REB – operates a satellite One-Stop Career Center at CONNECT to serve job seekers and employers. The WIF grant will allow Career Source to expand its satellite CONNECT center staffing by two positions, a Career Counselor and an Employment Specialist.
- **Bunker Hill Community College** – based in Charlestown with a satellite Chelsea facility, the college helps clients to access financial aid and training programs. The WIF grant will underwrite transition to college and career pathways training contextualized for Allied Health certificate training for CONNECT cohorts.
- **Centro Latino** – a respected multi-service workforce development agency provides English for Speakers of Other Languages, GED adult education and computer classes; these classes are over-subscribed with long wait-lists. The WIF grant will double Centro's training capacity at CONNECT and allow for a new training that contextualizes English language training for those seeking employment that involves computer use.
- **Chelsea Neighborhood Developers** – a community development corporation engaged in affordable housing development, public benefits screening, free tax preparation, financial education and asset development programming. The organization manages CONNECT's facility and provides a strong administrative platform for the new program. CND will supervise

grant-supported coaching, intake and referral staff that will increase and deepen client utilization of CONNECT services.

- **Metro Credit Union** –a non-profit regional credit union headquartered in Chelsea, provides financial products and services tailored to CONNECT’s population. The Credit Union is the third largest employer in Chelsea and provides industry briefings at the one-stop center.
- **The Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership** –assists CONNECT clients to secure and maintain affordable housing. A stable home provides a critical foundation for employment retention and economic advancement.

CONNECT’s clients come to the center through any one of the partner’s activities and are then referred to additional services at the site. By co-locating and integrating services, CONNECT’s partners expect to reach a greater number of clients (4000/yr are targeted), and a greater number of clients with multiple services than each partner could serve on its own. We posit that annually, 1500 clients will return to CONNECT for a second service, and that 600 will utilize intensive services supported by one-on-one financial coaching or career and academic counseling. This level of bundled and integrated service delivery supported by coaching and peer support, will result in better interim and long-term employment, educational and economic outcomes.

CONNECT’s partners and the Metro North Regional Employment Board are well positioned to make CONNECT succeed. The project benefits from strategic leadership drawn from the partners, public workforce development, academia, and large regional employers who will facilitate positioning CONNECT to become a sustainable part of the workforce development system.

Description of Proposed Evaluation Strategy: The approach to the evaluation of the CONNECT initiative will be highly collaborative, with the managing partners working as a team to develop new sources of data, a shared data platform, and to work with an outside evaluation team to undertake a rigorous evaluation of the system changes related to the work and the factors associated with different levels of client outcomes. This collaborative team will be rooted in a strong learning orientation that seeks to better understand how some of the innovative elements of the initiative may lead to strong outcomes for the vulnerable population being served.

There are three basic areas for the evaluation: 1) measuring client outputs and outcomes; 2) understanding system changes fostered by CONNECT; 3) identifying the catalytic factors influencing the outcomes. The evaluation will focus on what is new and untested in the CONNECT model by looking at these key questions:

1. Are more services being accessed because of the innovative nature of CONNECT?
2. Is there any relationship between the type and utilization of services and the client specific outcomes?
3. Has the model led to sustainable changes in how service providers collaborative and how has the model achieved this?
4. Have there been cost efficiencies related to the model?
5. Do the activities lead to building social networks and social capital and does this in turn affect both client and system outcomes?

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