

**Connecting Community-Based Organizations with the Public Workforce System**  
DOL Region 2 Technical Assistance Forum, September 12, 2011

We'll share lessons learned in implementing an ARRA discretionary grant-funded green job readiness program to illustrate how neighborhood-based organizations can bring much strength to the public workforce system as trusted providers of supportive services, literacy instruction and case management. With the addition of an employment and training liaison, neighborhood agencies can more effectively connect job seekers with the public workforce system. Learn how this partnership is evolving in one Philadelphia neighborhood.

Participants will be able to:

- anticipate likely challenges and advantages of working with neighborhood-based organizations
- share their local experiences and lessons learned with other participants
- identify one or more resources needed to establish an effective partnership

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1. Neighborhood Centers add value to workforce system:
    - Wide range of services provided on-site (emergency bill paying, housing, childcare, computer lab)
    - Extensive referral network for other services
    - Pre-existing trust factor within the neighborhood
    - In close proximity to the homes of participants
    - Services available for all family members
    - Understand the unique needs of the specific neighborhood
  2. Problem: WIB identified gaps in service delivery system that neighborhood centers could fill.
  3. Hypothesis: Neighborhood centers could provide upfront assessment, literacy, career advising, ongoing case management and support, then **refer** to PA CareerLink® (one-stop center) for WIA training and job placement, while continuing to offer "wrap-around" and supportive services as needed
  4. Reality: Neighborhood centers needed to hire an employment and training liaison to supplement and connect with the workforce system.
  5. Achievements:
    - 2 grade level increase in literacy
    - Ongoing connection to solve family and personal problems (3 month supply of food)
    - Peer-to-peer connections, neighbors help each other
    - Job readiness – interview, resume prep, career paths

6. Lessons learned: "Connect" requires more than "Refer"
  - WIB convenes one-stop and neighborhood center staff leadership
  - ID point person from each organization to ease communications and solve problems
  - Map/diagram all steps for participant referral and WIA registration and eligibility
  - One-stop provides sample blank file and list of all eligibility documentation and other paperwork required
  - Arrange for group orientations and sign-ups at CareerLink
  - Takes persistence on both parts
  - *Train neighborhood staff in complexities (ITA vs. OJT; WIA, TANF)*
  
7. Lessons learned: Share workforce system resources with neighborhood centers to prepare job seekers
  - One-stop system extended KeyTrain license (with discount) plus staff training to neighborhood centers
  - WIB applied for foundation and DOL competitive grants (Green Pathways out of Poverty) to fund contextualized literacy, job readiness and training (supplementing WIA)
  
8. Lessons learned: Workforce system has limited capacity to provide intensive job readiness, 1:1 placement assistance or OJT, particularly *for emerging industries and small businesses*
  - The one-stop operator needs to be clear what they can and cannot deliver to neighborhood-based partners and job seekers
  - Partner with sector-based employer intermediary to engage employers with program design and participant job readiness.
  
9. Lessons learned: Build on, but be realistic about neighborhood organization's core competencies (they don't know what they don't know)
  - Workforce literacy is not just "literacy," so requires additional resources and employer partnerships (sidebar about Philadelphia's workforce literacy standards)
  - Neighborhood centers stretch to operate DOL-funded programs with data, budget, performance management requirements.
  - Contracting for job training is also a stretch for neighborhood centers
  - Need intermediary to facilitate partnership for neighborhood centers (Federation)
  - Always underfunded and overextended, but not an excuse not to partner
  
10. Lessons learned: Partnership requires both parties to bring resources and help to build each other's capacity. Not a one-way relationship.

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