



Commerce WorkFirst Employment Programs: *Community Jobs, Job Connection and Career Development Programs*

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Background

Community Jobs continues to be a WorkFirst program that assists participants who have multiple barriers to employment. Since 1998, *Community Jobs* has provided valuable work experience, increased self-confidence, marketable skills, and an avenue to permanent, unsubsidized employment. These participants are provided 20 hours per week of paid work experience, education/training to improve employability, and services to manage/remove barriers to employment.

The WorkFirst Re-design identified the need for additional employment services to meet the needs for additional TANF families struggling to find employment. Commerce introduced two additional employment programs effective July 1, 2011 designed to provide employment opportunities to additional participants:

- The *Job Connection* program is designed for participants who are considered more “job ready” but have been unsuccessful at obtaining employment through traditional job search efforts. Based on the transitional jobs employment model, the *Job Connection* program provides participants with opportunities to build references, develop networking connections, and demonstrate their work skills directly through employment by performing jobs within their chosen field. The *Job Connection* program consists of up to 3 months of paid employment at a worksite, paired with targeted job hunting activities and mentoring opportunities.
- The *Career Development* program is designed to support students while they are engaged in an educational pathway. The *Career Development* program provides a volunteer unpaid work activity to participants for up to 12 months to coincide with their education plan. Worksites are co-located on campus when possible and provide work experience to support the specific education/certification pathway. Participants are required to maintain their enrollment in the education activity to continue to participate in the *Career Development* program.

All Commerce WorkFirst employment programs are administered by the Department of Commerce through performance based contracts with 21 community-based organizations that provide direct services to families. Contractors develop job opportunities and employ participants at nonprofits and public agencies. They coordinate services and provide case management to ensure that participants gain access to opportunities that will lead to unsubsidized employment.

Program Updates

Job Connection Program

Since the program’s inception in July 2011, the *Job Connection* program has been well received across the state. *Job Connection* participants report appreciating the opportunities they are provided not only through edge of having current employment but also having the chance to increase networking within the business community, enhance their employability through current job references in the job market. From the point of program orientation, service providers emphasize the focus on the employment goal



and that all activities are designed to assist the participant in obtaining an unsubsidized job. The program allows for the flexibility to allow the participant to engage in a variety of job hunting activities in addition to the experience they are gaining on the job. Contractors provide support to both the worksite and the participant to address any issues that occur on the job for the duration of their program. Individual job hunting activities include career mentoring opportunities, scheduled job clubs, direct connection with a case manager/job developer who provides ongoing support, maintains regular contact and holds participants accountable to their employment goals.

Preliminary employment outcome data is expected in the Spring of 2012.

Career Development Program

Since the program's inception in July 2011, the *Career Development* program has slowly but steadily increased in usage as partnership staff gain an understanding of the program's intent and goals. Initial referrals to this program were slow but have started to increase with the fall quarter and are expected to increase with spring quarter college enrollments. Although significantly smaller, this program is providing a much needed and valued employment opportunity for college students as funding for Work Study programs is being reduced. Participants report they appreciate being able to gain employment experience applicable to their field of study. Additional advantages for this program include worksites that are on-campus whenever possible, work hours that are flexible and designed around their class schedules, and the opportunity for peer-to-peer mentoring with other students in their career field.

Program outcome measures are currently being established with the Performance Measure Workgroup.

Next steps

Commerce anticipates continuing to provide these three individual employment programs to meet the various needs of the TANF caseload that struggle with finding employment. Our efforts continue to work on expanding program opportunities directly with the employer market through expanded efforts to collaborate at the community level as well as through statewide business affiliates and alliances.

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