



May 9, 2018

Rick Roy, Director
Workforce Systems Coordination
MN Department of Employment and Economic Development
St. Paul, MN

Dear Mr. Roy,

Please accept this letter outlining updates to the Region 2/Northeast Minnesota Regional Plan per the guidance memo dated February 28, 2018. For questions or clarifications, please contact Michelle Ufford at michelle.ufford@nemojt.org or (218) 735-6173.

Sincerely,

Bud Stone, Chair
Northeast Workforce Development Board

Mary Ferguson, Chair
Duluth Workforce Development Board

Section A: Regional Plan

Question 6, update to system alignment: *Describe how the local area boards will direct system alignment within the region through shared policies and practices.*

Workforce Center Operations committees referenced in the original regional plan will also act as local Center liaisons for the implementation of CareerForce and carrying out sections of the regional plan specifically related to Workforce Centers. These activities include making recommendations to the oversight group of partner managers for improving the physical environment of Workforce Centers to create an atmosphere more welcoming to a diverse population and coordinating Center-specific cultural competency training.

Question 7, Additional cooperative agreement: *Describe any cooperative service arrangements being planned for the region and how they will promote consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy.*

The Northeast Partner Group, a consortium of the leaders and managers of local Workforce Center partners who oversee Center operations in both the Northeast area and the City of Duluth, have recently developed a Cooperative Staffing Agreement to demonstrate and articulate the expectation that staff will support each other across agency lines. Signed by all local Workforce Center partners, this agreement acknowledges the challenges associated with a shared-staffing model used in Workforce Center reception and resource areas. The agreement emphasizes that regardless of the employer of record, all Workforce Center partner managers expect front-line staff to back each other up when needed by filling in for each others' designated reception and resource area time as needed, co-facilitating workshops and presentations, and finding other ways of increasing collaboration and understanding among partner programs. The agreement also describes the limitation of VRS and SSB in providing staff for reception and resources areas and explains how they contribute in other ways so as to create a more universal understanding of partner roles and responsibilities. NEMOJT, AEOA, the City of Duluth, DEED Job Service/Vets/LMI, VRS, and SSB have all signed on the agreement.

Question 10, Update to regional asset mapping initiative: *Describe the condition of the regional workforce development system and cite the sources of data and analysis.*

The regional asset mapping initiative was completed in the fall of 2017. The UMD Bureau of Business and Economic Research was selected by both the Northeast and Duluth WDBs as the provider of services through a competitive RFP process. This project analyzed the mix of employment and support services offered throughout the region to aid regional planning and align service providers around initiatives important to the region. The study assessed services focused on specific populations (in general, all agencies surveyed serve a more diverse audience than the overall population) and the type and availability (by geography) of services within the four categories of employment services, educational services, support services, and services for special populations. Respondents were asked to name the top barriers facing their customers/clients which validated the Board's existing knowledge of regional challenges, such as lack of reliable transportation, education and training, childcare, and appropriate soft skills in addition to issues related to mental health. The analysis identified gaps in mental health resources, services for individuals with disabilities, transitional and permanent housing, and the overall provision of support services. In fact, it was identified that Workforce Center programs are the primary source of supportive services for job seekers throughout the region. This data will be used to engage other service providers and agencies in strategic efforts regarding transportation and better understanding the mental health system to identify ways of more closely working with these organizations to serve job seekers.

Area 1 – Business Engagement: Update to sector initiatives

As noted in the original plan, Region 2 leadership has selected healthcare and construction as the first two sector initiatives. Healthcare efforts are more advanced than construction thanks to the work of the

Duluth Workforce Development Board who developed their career pathways initiative several years ago prior to the new regional plan. In the late spring of 2018, these largely Duluth-based efforts will be expanded to the whole region via a healthcare workforce summit. This summit will invite healthcare leaders from across the 7-county region to attend a session facilitated by the National Rural Health Resource Center, based in Duluth.

The objectives of this first meeting include:

- Introducing the Duluth WDB healthcare career pathway efforts including the expansion and validation of several career pathway graphics to represent healthcare opportunities for the region as a whole.
- Gathering input from hospitals as employers on ways the regional healthcare system can support their needs in terms of needs and methods for supporting those needs.
- Identifying specific hospital organization workforce champions and gain commitment from these individuals for leading specific career pathway projects or other workforce development initiatives
- Increased brand recognition for the Workforce Centers and strengthen partnership relationships with the participating health care organizations
- Increased awareness of Workforce Center resources and
- Share current MN labor force data and validate draft career pathway visual depicting opportunities in healthcare.

We are fortunate to have the National Rural Health Resource Center in this region which has experience facilitating dialogue and developing strategies around healthcare workforce development. Using this expertise, they will facilitate this first 3-hour summit event to be scheduled in June with up to 50 healthcare representatives expected to participate from across the 7-county region. We intend to identify healthcare champions who are willing to engaging with the Northeast and Duluth WDBs to duplicate and expand career pathway initiatives throughout the region following Duluth's model.

The Northeast WDB's Skilled Trades Career Pathway committee has engaged a number of small and large employers in the exploration and development of career pathway opportunities within the construction sector. The committee has elected to begin with developing a skilled trades career awareness campaign aimed at students and their influencers (teachers, counselors, and parents), with a special emphasis on engaging underrepresented populations, including women and girls. From this campaign, career pathway materials will be developed and promoted and potential training initiatives and sector partners will be identified. The core committee includes representatives from such large companies as Ulland Brothers and Minnesota Power/Allete and small business intermediaries such as the Northern Minnesota Builders Association and Chambers of Commerce. Additional members on this committee represent the trades (Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union #589, Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Union 1 MN/North Dakota, and AFL-CIO, all of whom are active members of either the Iron Range Building and Trades Council or the Duluth Building and Trades Council that represent all construction trades in the region). Additional private sector employers will be engaged in the development of the messaging and implementation of this campaign as it progresses.

In addition, the Duluth and Northeast WDBs have sponsored a series of workshops for employers focusing on the topics of recruitment and retention to support the regional goal of stronger, more deliberate business engagement. This series was kicked off with a regional event in February 2018 to highlight demographic challenges and emphasize that employers must think outside the box to successfully find the workers they need. The kick off was followed by an April 18 session focused on recruitment strategies that featured a keynote address by Janice Urbanik, Senior Director for the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and a panel of four diverse employers who have found success with a variety of creative recruitment strategies. A session on retention strategies will be on May 16 with a similar format, featuring Nancy Lyons, CEO of Clockwork, as the keynote speaker. Nancy is a nationally-recognized and highly awarded expert on retention strategies, with an upcoming book entitled *How to Win at Business by Being Nice to Humans*. Both sessions are being duplicated in two different locations on the same day to help employers from the farthest reaches of the region attend.

The workforce solutions series was a strong collaborative effort between many regional partners on behalf of both boards, including economic development, higher education, and workforce service providers. The planning committee included active partners such as the City of Duluth, the College of St. Scholastica, NorthForce, DEED, the Duluth Seaway Port Authority, the Head of the Lakes United Way, the AFL-CIO, Northspan, Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, APEX, and the UMD Center for Economic Development. Additional sessions on topics like diversity and equity in the workplace may be offered in the future contingent upon the feedback received after all sessions.

Area 2 -- Community Engagement

Both the Duluth and Northeast WDBs have their own diversity and equity committees which are joining forces to assess and develop cultural competency of the regional workforce system. Both committees had discussion independent from each other regarding the need to start 'in house' by ensuring our own staff and programs are as culturally adept as possible before moving on to help the employer community engage in meaningful discussion about their role in employment disparities. It is hoped that our experience taking a critical look at our own system and taking measures to improve weaknesses related to cultural competency will lend credibility to both boards and the system as a whole for future disparities initiatives.

In discussions to address cultural competency training for staff, part of the original regional plan, the committees both agreed to explore employing the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as a means of deliberately and clearly identifying the areas of cultural competency training needed by staff. The IDI would also set the benchmark from which improvement will be measured, as the test can be taken repeatedly to assess cultural competency growth. Board and equity committee members will be assessed first by a trained IDI Qualified Administrator, followed by partner agency management and front line staff. Aggregate results from these groups will be used to design cultural competency training initiatives over the next year.

The committees are now in the process of determining cost associated with this effort as well as identifying IDI Qualified Administrators with whom to contract. LeAnn Littlewolf, trainer and IDI Qualified Administrator with the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO) is acting as

advisor in initiative design. We join good company in this work as several regional partners including the Northland Foundation, the Blandin Foundation, AEOA, and the IRRRB have also engaged in using IDI to increase cultural competency within their own organizations. Together this work will strengthen our region's ability to understand and serve people with different cultural perspectives.

Area 3 – Customer Centered Design

As part of the Region 2 plan, we are about to embark on further alignment of employment and training services through the unifying experience of the CareerForce rebranding. We intend to use this opportunity to be more deliberate about human-centered design of Workforce Centers, including a more welcoming atmosphere that people look forward to visiting. All Workforce Center partners will be actively engaged in this process which will be coordinated locally by WFC Operations Committees. We will soon be conducting focus groups of current customers and first-time customers to determine public perception of Workforce Centers, both as physical places and by reputation. Actions taken as a result of these focus groups (paint, furniture, processes, etc.), set to occur in late summer/early fall, will coincide with the implementation of CareerForce and used locally as a way to promote services and engage more people in the system.