

Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board

Workforce Development Areas 5 (CMJTS) & 17 (SBETC)

Overview describing the innovative practice

Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, Inc. (CMJTS) and Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council (SBETC) formed a strategic alliance, focused on working together to form the Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board. The planning conversations started with the two Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) directors: Tammy Biery, executive director for SBETC and Barbara Chaffee, CEO for CMJTS. The strategic alliance is important because both organizations have something to gain and share. In utilizing the alliance, CMJTS and SBETC together can access opportunities to reach new markets, minimize financial risks, and improve their competitive advantage. The alliance is based off a written agreement that was crafted jointly by the two organizations. This agreement articulates the goals, which are critical to ensure the relationship to be built on a strong foundation.

From September through December 2015, Chaffee and Biery met to affirm coordination of services in the region. Together they developed future board agendas, drafted vision and goal statements for the planning region to present, first, to their local boards for approval. Both Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB) agreed to start the regional planning with small steps, beginning with forming a joint regional board—the Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board (R3LPB). The first R3LPB meeting was January 29, 2016. The board was comprised of the chair and vice chairs from each of the respective LWDBs and Joint Powers Boards, Biery, Chaffee, and two staff from both CMJTS and SBETC.

The R3LPB formally approved the board structure, which requires that the R3LPB chair and vice chair be elected from different LWDBs. It was also agreed upon by the entire board that Biery and Chaffee would have voting privileges. Other staff on the board do not have voting rights, but provide information to the R3LPB. A priority at the planning board's first meeting was to emphasize that the two organizations were working together on regional planning and collaboration efforts, but were not merging together, which defines a strategic alliance. The R3LPB knew they had challenges to surpass to see the value in a regional alliance. They reinforced the baseline philosophy that working together allows for leveraging of resources and increased capacity for joint efforts. The board reviewed the purpose of WIOA and the regional expectations that are outlined in the law. From this information, the group set goals for the region and determined the vision and mission of the newly formed board.

The vision and mission statements of the R3LPB are: *Vision – The R3LPB is committed to the establishment of regional strategies that are progressive, innovative, collaborative, and responsive to the needs of its communities within the 13-county region. Mission – To improve the economic prosperity of businesses and jobseekers in Region 3 by collaborating with key stakeholders to provide successful solutions to workforce, education, and economic development needs.* A memorandum of understanding outlines the implementation and work processes of the R3LPB.

Using DEED's labor market information and input from employers, the board selected the healthcare and manufacturing sectors on which to focus their collaborative efforts. For example, one of the R3LPB goals is to pursue appropriate workforce development grants that benefit the region and the designated sectors. These joint grant submissions will go before the regional board for approval. The regional board will determine the fiscal agent for each grant awarded and develop a fiscal agent agreement that outlines the "process" for distribution of funds, recording, reporting, and performance measures attained.

The regional board will approve all regional grant submissions and report them to LWDBs. A marketing strategy was created that includes "touting our regional accomplishments" and "sharing them with the community." All grant awards will be placed in LWDA 5's and LWDA 17's websites, key newspapers, social media, etc. The R3LPB will continue to meet, quarterly or as needed, to ensure that the plan moves forward and does not remain a "document on the shelf." The regional plan includes:

- Review DEED's regional and local plans: Minnesota's Workforce Development System under WIOA
- Set Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board agendas and meeting dates
- Schedule Region 3 Leadership and Planning Board quarterly meetings
- Schedule LWDB 17 and LWDB 5 joint meetings twice per year to work on regional issues
- Invite key stakeholders to support regional planning efforts, e.g., colleges, workforce development, economic development, Adult Basic Education representatives, WorkForce Center partners, county commissioners, and sector business leaders, etc.
- Assess diems and travel expenses for regional board members

To date, the R3LPB has developed vision and mission statements, statement of values, statement of purpose, guiding principles for assessment of the R3LPB progress, a memorandum of understanding, a fiscal agent agreement, a regional plan, initial regional goals, and has submitted several regional grants.

Jobseeker impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

Under the guidance of the R3LPB, Region 3 becomes the "preferred region" for employment with workforce family-sustaining wages, equity, and diversity in the workplace; increases the number of youth receiving high school diplomas or GEDs to ensure

successful participation in the world's best workforce; increases student awareness of career pathways and all available options for experiential, service, and work-based learning opportunities; ensures all individuals receive information about Region 3 WorkForce Centers and their services; aligns with statewide goals in a unified approach to close the racial disparities gap in employment; and pursues workforce grants to serve Region 3 businesses, jobseekers, and its emerging workforce. These impacts lead to the region's jobseekers increased awareness of job opportunities, skills needed, educational opportunities, and the potential for long-term career advancement in the region.

Employer/Community impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

Through this strategic alliance, employers and the communities will have access to increased workforce development resources, including increased grant-funded opportunities to train entry-level workers and to upskill the current workforce. An upskilled workforce will benefit local employers and help address the need to fill the "pipeline" with qualified workers needed for the 21st century. The alignment of resources, including increased employer engagement to ensure the region is meeting employer needs, will result in high-quality services to businesses and support education and economic development initiatives. These efforts will result in workers earning family-sustaining wages and employers who have skilled workers to succeed in the global economy.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

The R3LPB seeks assistance from knowledgeable industry experts, business leaders, educators, ABE, economic development, workforce development partners, community-based organizations, the Initiative Foundations, mayors, local legislators, etc., to provide data that will be used to develop a solid regional plan. Guest speakers from healthcare and manufacturing sectors are utilized to inform the R3LPB of healthcare and manufacturing industry needs.

R3LPB board members: Barbara Chaffee – CMJTS CEO/Director; Tammy Biery – SBETC executive director; Rick Greene – Chisago County, CMJTS Joint Powers Board chair; Leigh Lenzmeier – Stearns County, SBETC Joint Powers Board chair; Harlan Madsen – Kandiyohi County, CMJTS Joint Powers vice chair; Jim McMahan – Benton County, SBETC Joint Powers Board vice chair; Trish Taylor, CMJTS Workforce Development Board Chair; Loren Nelson – CMJTS Workforce Development vice chair; Heidi Pepper, SBETC Workforce Council chair; and Jill Magelssen – SBETC Workforce Council vice chair. Also involved as staff or community contributors are: Leslie Wojtowicz, CMJTS development manager; David Green, SBETC program manager; Victoria Hosch, CMJTS executive assistant; Kari Schmitz, SBETC administrative assistant; Luke Greiner, DEED regional analyst; and guest speakers from healthcare and manufacturing sectors.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

The R3LPB is tapping into key stakeholders to get input in the work that will be done for the Region 3 plan. The group is leveraging existing events to engage stakeholders on workforce issues and leveraging staff time for increased capacity for grant writing and resources. For example, Region 3 aligns with statewide goals in a unified approach to close the racial disparities employment gap through these joint events in 2016:

- March 30: Hiring Immigrant Workforce 101
- April 8: The Face of Your New Employee: Workplace Diversity
- April 27: Job Seeker Forum
- June 29: Employer Discussion II
- August: Job Seeker Preparation
- September 27: Job and Career Fair
- October 14: The Healthcare Sector: Challenges and Opportunities
- Hiring diverse populations: people of color, disabilities, LGBT, immigrants, seniors

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

By understanding best practices for creating and managing this strategic alliance, CMJTS and SBETC can utilize the learning that comes from operationalizing the alliance to create a standard model. With a strong sense of trust, leadership of two LWDBs developed a regional plan and encouraged their boards to see the value in the regional relationship. Goals were set and a mission was developed as a group to create joint ownership in the process. The memorandum of understanding set the stage to clear any former misconceptions and assure all parties that the process is a regional planning process, not a merger. It emphasized the need for open and honest communication, established the philosophy of continuous improvement, and encouraged strong partnerships by building capacity for the region. SBETC and CMJTS believe the alliance is a unique approach to regionalism, a creative example of two businesses finding ways to develop strategic advantages in the ever-changing workforce development system.