

Program/Initiative Title: Immigrant Employment Connection Group (IECG)
WDA Name: Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council

Overview describing the innovative practice

A group of community leaders saw a need in early 2015 to help the East African population find jobs. A group formed, now called the Immigrant Employment Connection Group (IECG), to host a job fair for these new Americans. From this experience, the group learned that employers attended the event to learn about this population, not necessarily to recruit the job seekers in attendance. Based on event survey results, the IECG knew they had to educate employers in order to make effective connections between employers and the job seekers. They also learned job seekers are not accustomed to job fairs and need training.

The Immigrant Employment Connection Group has hosted a number of employer and job seeker events since the group formed in 2015. Based on participant feedback, the group fulfills a role by providing the support needed in order to make effective connections between employers and the job seekers. The members of the IECG are working to better the community by addressing workforce development issues which improve the health and wellbeing of job seekers and their families. With the current worker shortage, our work will also improve the health of the businesses we serve. This work has maintained momentum because the members are so passionate about achieving our goals. The work of the IECG has been made possible by the donations of people's time, meeting space, resources to present data and share experiences at no or minimal cost.

IECG's Goals:

- Educate employers to remove barriers to hiring the immigrant population including: language, accommodations, transportation, child care, limited education
- Increase workplace diversity
- Address workforce issues in the community, a continued effort to solve a problem
- Create meaningful connections between employers and job seekers
- Assist job seekers in obtaining employment

The IECG's focus is to educate employers and assist them in overcoming barriers that are real or perceived when hiring the immigrant population. To make the greatest impact, the group has decided to focus on individuals with minimal skills and have hurdles to overcome. Some hurdles include language barriers, transportation issues, etc. This population has the highest need which aligns with the quantity of open entry level positions in the community. Future goals include expanding our focus.

Jobseeker impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

Our new immigrant job seekers benefit as the IECG has hosted immigrant job fairs and the group has been instrumental in breaking down the barriers and uncertainties for employers thus, allowing the employers to be more open to hiring new immigrants.

Employer/Community impact (ie: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

Employers benefit from IECG as they:

- Share best practices
- Learn about employer sessions & job fairs
- Innovate
- Collaborate
- Learn new ideas that work
- Validate ideas
- Brainstorm together

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

SBETC's Executive Director Tammy Biery facilitates this group.

Committee members include:

Jama Alimad, Central MN Community Empowerment

Joan Berning, DEED Job Service

Tammy Biery, Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council (SBETC)

Brianda Cediell, Hands Across the World

Kelly Gerads, DEED Job Service

Gail Cruikshank, Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation

Don Hickman, Initiative Foundation

Hudda Ibrahim, St. Cloud Technical and Community College

Jennifer Jimenez-Wheatley, RESOURCE, Inc.

Lori Theis, United Way

Abdul Kulane, Central MN Community Empowerment

Lee Morgan, Morgan Family Foundation

Nancy Myers, GNP

Okuni Ojulu, Community Leader

Jane Stevenson, Adult Basic Education (ABE)

Elizabeth Valencia-Borgert, St. Cloud State University (SCSU)

Kristin Yeager, Central MN Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS)

Lisa Zolin, Viking Coca-Cola

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

The work of the IECG has been made possible by the donations of people's time, meeting space, resources to present data and share experiences at no or minimal cost.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned

SBETC issues surveys after every event to pinpoint challenges and identify barriers.

To make the greatest impact, the group has decided to focus on individuals with minimal skills and have hurdles to overcome. These hurdles include language barriers, transportation issues, etc. This population has the highest need which aligns with the quantity of open entry level positions in the community. Future goals include expanding our focus.

Some IECG events/ topics have included employer panels, round table discussions, understanding barriers, immigrant job seeker preparation, New American job fairs, understanding Somali culture at the workplace, continued cultural training for employers and Latino cultural training.

The IECG does not claim to have all the answers, but have offered to be source to provide connections with others in the community that could be a resource. A Resource Guide has also been developed and continues to be a living document. As new resources are found and added, the guide is shared with any of the businesses that have engaged in the conversation at IECG events.