

## **Lorain County Workforce Development Agency A True Partnership with Higher Education**

The Lorain County, Ohio, Workforce Development Agency has formed a true partnership with higher education to provide a seamless system of workforce development, regardless of whether individuals first visit the Lorain County one-stop center, community college, or joint vocational school (JVS).

In 1996, the county's community college, JVS, and chamber of commerce created the Workforce Institute of Lorain County, Inc., to promote the cooperative delivery of workforce development services. With the passage of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the Institute became the county's one-stop center, linking it to the WIA system.

The partnership didn't reach its full potential until the region had to confront the current economic recession. First there was "Make Your Layoff Pay Off," which took a new community college scholarship for dislocated workers, and leveraged it with staff, facilities, data access, and tuition assistance from the one-stop center and JVS. This was a true partnership, characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, without the promise of financial reimbursement.

Make Your Layoff Pay Off included mass orientation sessions for individuals interested in accessing training, required career awareness activities, and guaranteed funding from WIA individual training accounts, Pell grants, and/ or the community college scholarship program. Through this program, 176 trainees were provided almost \$450,000 in scholarship funds in just a few weeks.

With the advent of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, \$1.2 million in stimulus funds were added to the mix, and "Stimulate Your Career" was launched. This program has served over 1,500 potential participants, with about 340 additional individuals enrolled in training at an approved provider. About a third of the participants are enrolled at the community college, a third at the JVS, and a third elsewhere. Now, the local one-stop system is expanding to include two additional centers, one at the community college and another at the JVS.

There are five key components to this partnership:

1. Staff from all of the partner organizations works with the participants to help them find the training they need, regardless of provider, along with the most appropriate source of funding, rather than awarding funding based upon which agency the student initially contacted.
2. All participants are required to participate in career awareness activities to set a career goal.
3. The partnership brings together funding resources from federal and state sources; the community college scholarships provide a safety net for those individuals who are ineligible for state or federal funds.
4. The community college developed new class-size certificate programs for adults transitioning from one career to another, with the programs providing a pathway to an associate's degree.
5. WIA and Trade Assistance Act funds are used to provide transitioning adults with support services they need to persist in their training or job search.

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