

# Coordinating Employer Outreach & Improving Job Referrals

NORTH CENTRAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

*In the past, Workforce Investment and Wagner-Peyser outreach efforts were typically performed independently. There was no intent to work separately; instead there was no serious plan to work collaboratively. Coordinated business outreach became intentional.*



## NORTH CENTRAL'S RESPONSE

North Central partners ramped up business outreach activities serving 100 more companies than in the previous year. The WorkSource Business Team (Employment Security, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Service Alternatives, OIC, Community Colleges and the Workforce Development Council) met weekly to share information and resources. Team members communicated daily by phone, email or in person. The team doubled the number of employer tours to expand staff knowledge and better understand company job requirements.

Business team leadership updated the outreach strategy quarterly. They jointly selected and contacted firms to discover employment related business problems and presented solutions such as personnel services, qualified candidates, training resources and technical assistance. Business service staff increased skill testing using objective assessments such as Provelt, KeyTrain, CASAS, etc. The Business Team blogs, writes newsletter articles, and makes presentations to local Chambers, Visitors' Bureaus, Downtown Associations and industry and trade groups to further educate business and community members about workforce services.

Job referrals better match employer expectations because employers have been urged to elaborate on the specific job requirements. Skill testing enables staff to make more appropriate referrals or to redirect candidates to more appropriate job



## THE CHALLENGE

The agriculture industry accounts for 30 percent of North Central's workforce. While this industry creates thousands of skilled jobs, it creates even more low skilled jobs. As a result, the percentage of North Central's residents with less than a ninth grade education is three times the state average.

Other primary industries are Food Processing, Manufacturing and Power Generation. Lumber and wood products slumped in 2009 as the last sawmill in the region closed. Twenty-five years ago, the region had six mills employing 1,000 workers. The lending bust has also crippled the construction industry as the median home price has dropped 21% since 2008.

Between July and December 2008, unemployment jumped from 5 to 10% where it persists. Demand on workforce agencies doubled. Workshops that typically had 15 participants now had 25-30. College classes filled up.

The one-stop partnership led the response to expand services, including reaching out to more employers.

