

Public-Private Partnership

Pre-employment training program fuels growth

PARTNERS:

- Heath Tecna
- Northwest Workforce Council
- Washington Department of Commerce
- Northwest Economic Council
- Impact Washington
- Bellingham Technical College
- WorkSource Whatcom Career Center
- Employment Security Department
- Manpower
- Kelly Services
- Bellingham Waterfront Innovation Partnership

Nearly 400 Whatcom and Skagit County residents have good paying jobs today due, in part, to the efficient way workforce and economic development professionals responded to the needs of a local aerospace manufacturer to recruit and train new production workers.

The story begins late in 2009 when staff from the state's Department of Commerce and the Northwest Economic Council discovered that Heath Tecna, a producer of passenger aircraft interiors headquartered in Bellingham, needed to quickly increase production to fill new international orders. They brought in the Northwest Workforce Council, which led an effort that has helped keep production humming.

Working together, the project's partners created a pre-employment screening and training program that made it possible for the area's unemployed and underemployed to rapidly fill these living-wage jobs. This, in turn, allowed the company to expand global sales and exports through a consistent supply of qualified workers capable of working in a newly reengineered LEAN production environment.

Screening started at the WorkSource Whatcom Career Center. Suitable candidates were then referred to Heath Tecna's staffing service providers (Manpower and Kelly Services) for additional screening. Applicants who completed that process then undertook a two week pre-employment training developed by the company and Bellingham Technical College. The training is funded by the Governor's discretionary portion of federal Workforce Investment Act training dollars. Approval by the Employment Security Department made it possible for laid-off workers to train without looking for work during training or losing their Unemployment Insurance benefits.

During the initial training summer of 2010, 380 of 449 students passed testing and began work as temporary hires (via the two private staffing services). After 90 days, they were hired by the employer with a wage bump and benefits. Production employee retention rates at the plant soared to 67%. Newly hired employees weren't the only ones to benefit from the training program's quick turnaround time. Heath Tecna executives estimate the program supported a 60% increase in export activity from June 2010 to December 2011.

By assembling a Dream Team of professionals, the Heath Tecna Aerospace Pre-Employment Screening and Training program has set a model of private and public investments that gets laid off workers back to work quickly and efficiently, helping local families and a local company thrive.



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