

ARKANSAS WORKFORCE SYSTEM EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - NORTHEAST REGION

Sites Visited - Jonesboro and Paragould

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to provide a concise overview of the Northeast Region site report. This summary is intended to be shared with regional leaders so they may respond to the recommendations with action strategies for process improvements.

Strengths



Highlights of Organizational Structure

Analysis: The Northeast region doesn't see leadership as a structure but rather as a co-managed team process, where multiple partners coordinate services and resources. Roles are clear at the top, less clear understanding of the leadership structure exists with line staff. The following details the various approaches of Organizational Structure:

- ✓ A noticeable climate of cooperation exists in the AWC (Arkansas Workforce Center) and it's clear the vision starts with leadership.
- ✓ Many of the local private sector Board members are active customers of the AWCs.



Highlights of Collaboration

Analysis: Collaboration is a leadership issue. This region has had many successful partnership efforts that have positive impacts on customers. A climate of trust, respect and communication has developed.

- ✓ Partners are seeing more and more of the benefits of collaborating, especially in trying to meet all the needs customers have, not just their initial reason for coming in to the Center.
- ✓ Processes are in place to make all customers aware of all services, and to do "personal hand offs" to other staff when appropriate. This type of informal referral process promotes peer to peer connections and is often more effective with customers.



Highlights of Customer Service

Analysis: While there is a high value put on quality customer service, it is not measured or benchmarked. Staff in focus groups and interviews saw value in a more systematic process for gathering, reporting and using customer feedback to improve. The following points exhibit efforts leading to quality customer service:

- ✓ A leadership commitment of creating a customer focused culture is evident.
- ✓ Staff display a sense of pride in Center services and are very positive about their dedication to customer service.
- ✓ Anecdotal feedback generally indicates a positive customer experience.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Challenges

- The co-managed leadership model is tested when conflicts arise. While this is a challenge, it is also a strength when collaborative solutions emerge. When site leaders were asked who they would go to if conflicts arose, they identified Judy Duncan (AOC) and ETS (Employment Training Services) staff as needed. Both leaders were comfortable that this process would work.
- The further down you go in the organizational structure, the more of a separate or silo identity you find. It is still collaborative, but a challenge to sustain.

Recommended actions:

- Create a consolidated organizational chart that clarifies the leadership model and clearly defines roles and responsibilities for all Centers in the region. Share this with all AWC staff and partner agencies.

SERVICE INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

Challenges

- The greatest challenge for service integration is fully incorporating TEA (Transitional Employment Assistance) and Work Pays into the AWC system. TEA and Work Pays staff still feel somewhat like outsiders in the system.
- Informal one to one cross training has many positives, yet it is inconsistent. Relying on staff initiated, informal cross training may miss the staff that don't take the time to do this on their own.
- Monthly partner meetings for staff are regularly cancelled and do not always meet staff needs.

Recommended actions:

- Focus on fully integrating the TEA program staff and customers into the AWC. Explore options with the Department of Human Services that will improve the initial handoff of customers to TEA.
- Survey staff on cross training needed and identify areas of impact they suggest as priorities. Newer staff may provide even more insight into this issue.
- Expand the spirit of collaboration through communication, and be more systematic about holding all staff and partner meetings that focus on process and information sharing in addition to social networking. This is especially critical given the additional partners at the new Center.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Challenges

- Feedback is gathered from employers using the AWC, but it is informal and does not classify as a systematic quality improvement process. Customer satisfaction is an important metric for the AWC, given the high value placed on customer service.

Recommended actions:

- The region would benefit from a strategically designed customer satisfaction process. Systematic data gathering from a significant sample of all customers, timely reporting and analysis of the data gathered, and a process to use the data to benchmark success and work towards improvement.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Challenges

- Performance management is strictly program based. Most staff view the AWC as successful, but are knowledgeable only about their own program performance (TEA, WIA, UI, ES, etc.).
- WIA has very high negotiated performance goals that DOL passes on through DWS. In fact, they are some of the highest in the country.
- The Certification Criteria calls for quantifiable and measurable goals for the Center as a whole and also calls for reporting and monitoring partner goals. This is not happening in a meaningful way and some leaders in the region are unsure if it's needed.

Recommended actions:

- Review existing performance data for each of the programs and create a regional profile with goals and outcomes in the simplest possible format. Present this profile to staff and partners and develop a meaningful measure of success, and collaborative strategy to achieve mutual gain.
- Broader AWC performance goals, such as customer satisfaction, numbers served, revenue generated from federal funds into the region, to name a few, could be organized into a quarterly AWC scorecard and reported to all stakeholders.

AWC BRAND

Challenges

- There are inconsistencies as to which identity is used on name tags, business cards and even how phones were answered.
- The website is less focused on the AWC brand as the portal to information.

Recommended actions:

- Partner leaders need to review overall marketing strategies and reduce inconsistencies in name tags, business cards, and how phones are answered. Since DWS is launching an AWC marketing campaign statewide, take advantage of their efforts and supplement them with local efforts.
- The Northeast region may want to review website options with State DWS officials to develop a more coherent pathway to link to the regional AWC website.

BUSINESS SERVICES/SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS**Challenges**

- All of the staff who provide business and employer services have multiple duties. They are Center managers, program managers, Veteran Representatives or WIA staff. Juggling multiple responsibilities and being the interface with the employer community is a challenge.
- Tighter budgets anticipated in the next few years may well strain resources, therefore, informal collaboration may need to be more highly organized to meet employers' needs.

Recommended Actions:

- Identifying and funding a dedicated Business Services Lead to take full advantage of the cooperation that exists and to add structure would be a good investment. Their scope of work could include special employer events coordination, onsite recruitments, development of a unified marketing plan, and systematically gathering and using employer and customer feedback. The right person in that position could leverage additional resources and improve outcomes for all partners.

Arkansas Workforce System Evaluation

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