PRO MISING PRACTICES

State Strategies for Advancing Apprenticeship

Expanding Apprenticeship to Meet Talent Needs of Business

IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & IDAHO CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Recognizing that businesses do not have time for multiple meetings with different agencies or one-size-fits-all solutions, Idaho redesigned their business outreach model to bring together workforce, education, and sector intermediary partners. They equipped partners to shift from a traditional sales approach – pushing products, taking orders, focusing on numbers of transactions – to a consultative model focused around business needs and customized solutions.

To grow apprenticeship, Idaho invested State Apprenticeship Expansion Grant funds in a business outreach team that includes a full-time “Regional Business Specialist” from the Job Center and a half-time Apprenticeship Training Coordinator (or “Solutions Specialist”) from the workforce training/continuing education department of the technical or community college in each of the state’s six regions. The team also includes three industry intermediaries in the IT, manufacturing, and healthcare sectors, along with P-TECH (a K-12 education system intermediary). They help conduct outreach and education about apprenticeship within their respective communities. The goal? A team equipped to explore customized talent solutions through a deep understanding of apprenticeship and the consultative, business-driven sales model.

To help reach this pivotal goal, project co-leads from the Idaho Department of Labor (DOL) and Idaho Career and Technical Education (CTE) brought the business outreach team together in March 2017 for 2.5 days of Onboarding Training. CTE co-lead Wendi Secrist wanted “everyone to leave having internalized why apprenticeship was such a great opportunity for businesses – to communicate the ‘why.’” Team members read the U.S. Department of Commerce return on investment (ROI) study in advance, spent one morning learning the apprenticeship model, and much of the remainder focused on connecting to the “why” through features-benefits exercises and crafting personalized, 60-second elevator speeches.

The co-leads coached the business outreach team to listen and tease out the business customer’s challenges with discovery questions such as “What are your hardest positions to fill? What skills are missing in candidates that apply? How do you onboard new employees? Does the training you provide/send your people to produce the skills you need?” They practiced customizing solutions to the problems identified – apprenticeship if appropriate, and, if not, other services such as talent screening or incumbent worker training.

Idaho uses the customer relationship management tool Insightly, requiring all team members to maintain good notes and check the system before any business outreach to avoid duplication and ensure coordination and consistency of messaging. At the training, participants compared lists of employers to identify any overlap and coordinate strategies as needed.

We used to focus on the acronyms and throw everything at businesses. Now we take a business approach. It’s about the employer and making sure they have what they need.

- John Russ and Wendi Secrist, ApprenticeshipIdaho Co-Leads

At the local level, Regional Business Specialists (from the Job Center) and Solutions Specialists (from the technical/community college) now meet with businesses as a team. Bringing together the workforce and educational systems minimizes handoffs, duplication of effort, and time for the business customer. The intermediary partners create interest, but instead of handing off interested businesses to the Regional Business and Solutions Specialists, they bring them into the conversation and then remain at the table for consistency of messaging and to help with trust-building.
ADVICE TO OTHER STATES

- **Treat Outreach as a Consultative Sales Process, Focusing on Companies with a Need.** The first meeting should be 80-90% listening. Equip the team with discussion questions to understand business needs. Make sure partners know the range of workforce services so they can treat apprenticeship as one option from a menu, and tailor solutions by pointing companies to the services that will meet their needs. “You have to approach it from the business’s perspective. If they aren’t having pain – trouble hiring or recruiting – it may not be the right time. Move on and check back with them later!” urges Wendi Secrist.

- **Bring Education and Workforce Together.** Kay Vaughan, Grants Management Officer with the Idaho Department of Labor, emphasizes that collaboration between education and workforce is “what makes it work! Business is used to thinking of us in our separate tracks, so doing this differently opens the door to get out of our routine and think differently about talent solutions.”

- **Invest in Local Capacity, Regardless of Barriers.** “Enhancing the capacity of local teams is critical,” according to Ms. Secrist. “If another state is looking at this model, even if local teams aren’t functioning like you’d want them to be, it doesn’t mean they should look elsewhere. Do a hard assessment of local teams and how you can build the environment you want. Don’t try and gloss over it – just get in there and work with it and help lead them to the right place.” Project co-lead John Russ describes that “right place” as the “mindset of ‘How can I?’ and not ‘No, we can’t.’”

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPLICATION

- **State Leadership Matters.** Agency leads from Idaho DOL and CTE championed Idaho’s effort, bringing people together to figure out how to grow apprenticeship and reassigning high-level people from their “regular” jobs to co-lead the project. The project co-leads, one from DOL and one from CTE, work closely with one another and their regional teams to build trust, providing the continuous support and communication that have been critical for success.

- **Intensive Training Up Front Creates Buy-In and Consistency of Messaging.** Team members’ understanding of apprenticeship varied wildly, and many were unfamiliar with the components and registration process. The state brought everyone together long enough to dive deep into the apprenticeship model, explore the benefits and how to address skepticism, get comfortable with their elevator pitches, and learn how to use a consultative sales approach to help businesses see the value of apprenticeship to meet their needs.

- **Use a Simple Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Tool.** Idaho uses a CRM tool to ensure coordinated communication and seamless messaging with businesses from anyone on the state or regional team.

- **Words Can Mean Different Things Across Institutions.** Be alert to the potential for misunderstandings and know that there will be difficult conversations, but willingness to work through them builds the team. For example, the education folks in Idaho thought the “related training outline” required for approval meant they had to develop the curriculum, when they simply needed to identify the learning outcomes provided through the related training instruction.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

- A committee of the state Workforce Development Council is looking at sustainability strategies, including funding for the half-time Apprenticeship Training Coordinator (Solutions Specialist) position at each technical college.

- Idaho is learning that training will be an ongoing need, as awareness grows, staff turnovers occur, new partners come on board, and the project progresses.

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To learn more, visit [www.apprenticeshipidaho.com](http://www.apprenticeshipidaho.com)

Find Idaho’s Business Outreach Training Agenda and Materials on the ApprenticeshipUSA Community of Practice here: [https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/07/12/17/00/SAE-Grantee-Training-Materials](https://apprenticeshipusa.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/07/12/17/00/SAE-Grantee-Training-Materials)