UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

NATIONAL EMERGENCY GRANT PROMISING PRACTICES SERIES:
ALIGNING NEG STRATEGIES WITH HIGH GROWTH SECTORS AND OCCUPATIONS

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About the National Emergency Grant Promising Practices Series

States and local areas that administer National Emergency Grants (NEGs) have developed a growing body of expertise in the effective management of these grants. The *National Emergency Grant Promising Practices Series* is a compilation of ten documents whose purpose is to highlight and share some exemplary approaches that were instrumental in preparing for, planning, and implementing a NEG. The intent of disseminating these effective methodologies on a broad, national level is to facilitate the continuous improvement of NEG project operations and to promote peer-to-peer information-sharing among practitioners.

The information presented in the *NEG Promising Practices Series* was gleaned from a study, which focused on the in-depth review of fifteen NEG projects that varied in type, size, and scope. Collectively, these projects represent an investment of $282,377,589 made by the Department of Labor (DOL) that helped states assist dislocated workers obtain reemployment in the aftermath of a large layoff or disaster-related event. The insights shared by these grantees were synthesized for dissemination, resulting in a set of promising practices that build upon four broad themes:

- *Infrastructure and Readiness.* How grantees have organized state and local delivery systems to ensure effective and efficient use of NEG resources;
- *Planning and Start-Up.* How grantees have mobilized key resources and stakeholders to facilitate effective grant planning and implementation;
- *Program Design and Implementation.* What specific interventions and services have been implemented to support the unique reemployment needs of dislocated workers; and
- *Institutional Results.* How NEG investments have directly or indirectly resulted in an enhanced capacity to respond to unexpected economic events.

Listed below are the ten documents, which comprise the *National Emergency Grant Promising Practices Series*. Each review addresses a specific area of NEG management and has been written to emphasize the specific planning, design, and operational decisions that contributed to successful retraining and reemployment strategies.

- *Working Across Boundaries in Planning a Regional NEG Response*
- *Expanding NEG Training Capacity Through Partnerships with Community Colleges*
- *Aligning NEG Strategies with High Growth Sectors and Occupations*
- *Peer Support Systems that Strengthen Outreach and Participation*
- *Preparing for the Unexpected in Disaster Grants*
- *Establishing and Managing a Temporary Jobs Program*
- *Implementing Transition Teams to Lead the Dislocation Response*
- *Partnering with Organized Labor to Support Reemployment*
- *Coordinating Resources to Meet the Reemployment Challenge*
- *Using Data Strategically to Align Job Seekers and Occupational Demand*

PREVIEW

NEG training and reemployment strategies must align with opportunities in growing industries that have potential for long-term career paths. Project operators should seek to transition workers by matching the existing experience and skills of dislocated workers with sectoral and occupational growth patterns. This practice will result in better employment outcomes for dislocated workers and will enhance NEG planning and implementation by accomplishing the following:

- *Infrastructure and Readiness.* Readily tapping existing data sources and policies that enable the targeting of growth occupations when a major layoff or other NEG-triggering event occurs.
- *Planning and Start-up.* Quickly designing a program targeted to the needs of both employers and impacted workers through an understanding of the demand side requirements of the labor market.
- *Program Design and Implementation.* Implementing a more customized NEG intervention allowing workers to transition to new career paths through retraining and employment services.

Several States' NEGs have used a variety of effective policies, planning strategies, and incentives to better align their program response with high growth sectors or occupations that enhance both current and future job opportunities for dislocated workers. The specific NEG strategies featured in this blueprint include:

- Identifying training and employment opportunities to best align with the unpredictable redevelopment pattern that evolves in the aftermath of a natural disaster;
- Defining training and employment opportunities for highly mobile military populations (including spouses) who are potentially operating in both regional and national labor markets;
- Developing tiered Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) as an incentive to fund training in growth sectors; and
- Emphasizing career pathways to ensure that workers have employment opportunities with advancement potential.

Learning from NEG Grantees: This blueprint discusses how NEG grantees adopted practices that seek to integrate retraining and services with the demands and growth patterns of their target labor markets. Insights are drawn from following States:

Mississippi. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the State of Mississippi dedicated a portion of its **Hurricane Katrina NEG** resources to invest in the retraining of workers for growth industries. This required identifying and responding to existing labor demand as well as to possibilities for economic development along the Gulf Coast. Using available information from employers and industry experts, the State identified target industries and then developed training to address occupations facing labor shortages. NEG Award Amount: $95,000,000.

Colorado. Resources from Colorado's **Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Implementation NEG** were used in Colorado Springs to serve dislocated workers affected by a shifting array of military investments. Successful reemployment would require a set of skills that was potentially in demand in many different labor markets. In response, Colorado State workforce staff identified an occupational cluster—information technology—that was experiencing significant growth across many sectors of the economy. Together with a national staffing agency and Pikes Peak Community College, they developed a credit-bearing, modularized training program to provide this target population with a more portable portfolio of skills. NEG Award Amount: $2,000,000.

Colorado. Arapahoe Douglas Works! (ADW), a Workforce Investment Board (WIB) near Denver, has adopted a sectoral initiative that awards greater ITA resources to workers training for high growth industries and under-saturated occupations. This policy was first used in conjunction with the **BRAC Implementation NEG** in late 2008 when ADW began working with dislocated workers affected by the closing of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). Now all workforce development investments made by the WIB fall under the policy providing affected workers with an incentive to pursue training in the targeted growth sectors.

Wisconsin. The Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin has implemented a policy that requires all trainings offered or funded to be in high demand occupations that pay a living wage or are on a career pathway that will lead to higher wages. Furthermore, the policy only allows for WIA investments to be made in training that leads to employment in industries experiencing regional growth. These priorities were initially established and informally emphasized in response to a series of dislocations during the first half of the decade. Over time, they have emerged as an area-wide commitment that applies to all WIA and NEG investments.

Collectively these grantees provide two broad approaches to how NEGs can support an emphasis on growth sectors and occupations. Workforce practitioners in Mississippi and Colorado (Pikes Peak WIB) developed *new* training programs to target growing sectors in response to local dislocation events. Grantees in Colorado (Arapahoe Douglas WIB) and

Wisconsin worked within *existing* policy and program parameters that served to shape their investments in training strategies for growth industries.

Developing New Training Programs that Target Growth Sectors and Occupations

NEG grantees crafting training strategies in Mississippi and Colorado were each faced with challenging circumstances:

- In Mississippi, the devastating nature of Hurricane Katrina generated its own unique recovery trajectory in which traditional growth patterns and projections were not in place.
- In Colorado, planners had to address the unique demands of a mobile military population that operated more broadly in a national labor market as well as in the local or regional labor market.

Mississippi—Targeting High Growth Sectors in Support of Disaster Recovery: Mississippi's initial focus for the disaster NEG was to meet immediate clean-up and humanitarian needs through a temporary jobs program. Following this effort, State officials turned their attention to the permanent job needs of workers dislocated by the storm. State officials allocated $10 million of their NEG resources to an initiative focusing on retraining in targeted growth sectors to support the economic recovery of the six-county coastal region most impacted by Hurricane Katrina. The program was designed to offer training that would help workers improve their long-term career opportunities through retraining and advancement.

Key Components of Mississippi's Sectoral Strategy

- *Industry needs assessment*
- *Customized training courses*
- *Use of local and national training providers including community colleges*
- *Integrated work experience to support disaster recovery*

Growth sectors and opportunities were identified by direct engagement with local employers on their labor needs. This included carefully monitoring calls from employers to the Governor's office as well as tracking market insights gathered in the field by representatives at local community colleges and impacted WIBs. These methods were necessary because of the unique economic recovery demands facing the State. More conventional data sources, such as occupational and business projections, were no longer reliable in the changed economic reality where emerging opportunities were shaped by the demands of the recovery. Ultimately, several target industries were selected that reflected

the post-Katrina recovery in the coastal counties. These included construction, healthcare, hospitality, and information technology.

Once the general target industries were identified, State officials held a series of local town hall meetings, business forums and roundtables, and meetings with local chambers of commerce to more clearly delineate employer and industry needs. Insights and commitments gathered through this process ultimately resulted in the formation of new, or in the strengthening of existing, employer advisory committees.

Mississippi's High Growth Training Strategy

One of the key roles the advisory committees played was to help develop **workforce needs surveys** that were to be conducted with employers in each of the target industries. The surveys were designed to identify specific workforce needs in each of the target sectors. Key findings from these surveys are highlighted in the box on the following page and provide examples of the concrete nature of the feedback generated.

Based on the findings of the surveys, customized training interventions were developed to address the workforce needs of several industry sectors. Examples from the healthcare and construction sectors are briefly summarized below:

Healthcare: Expanding and accelerating existing local training programs. Healthcare was the one sector in which an existing training provider, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC), was able to adapt its curriculum to meet the region's post-Katrina needs. While there were existing curricula and courses, MGCCC, with its traditional semester-based programming, could not provide enough skilled licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and surgical technicians to meet the level of demand. Additionally, the existing traditional, semester-based programs did not meet the needs of many dislocated workers anxious to enter training immediately. To better meet the pressing demand in this sector, program planners worked with MGCCC to develop accelerated courses that were offered in the evenings and on weekends.

Construction: Supplementing short-term foundational training with customized courses. Quickly after Katrina, staff from the Twin Districts WIB located in the heart of the Gulf Coast region began to offer short-term (forty hours) basic construction skills training to help dislocated workers get back into the workforce. While some individuals graduated from the course and were placed in the industry, the needs assessment process revealed that the training being offered did not fully meet the broader array of competencies currently needed. Instead of basic skills training, demand existed for more intensive courses in specific construction skills, including heating, ventilating, air conditioning (HVAC), electrical, plumbing, interior/exterior painting, masonry, and drywall.

Arranging training for these more comprehensive skill sets required reaching outside of the immediate coastal region for providers. Eventually, several non-profit and trade organizations were selected, and they delivered multiple courses ranging in length from four weeks to three months. In addition to more intensive training, providers also offered work experience through local residential home-building non-profit organizations that aided the disaster recovery.

Examples of Identified Industry or Employer Needs Gathered Through the Workforce Needs Surveys

Healthcare:

- *25 percent of physicians offices having difficulty finding staff*
- *Need more clinical sites for nursing training*
- *Need more flexible, non-semester based healthcare trainings*

Hospitality:

- *Need trained employees in the culinary and lodging industries, particularly cooks and front desk personnel*
- *Need hospitality employees with "soft skills" (e.g., problem solving skills, good workplace habits)*
- *Desire regional, portable certificate-based hospitality training program*

Construction:

- *Need more skilled tradesmen*

Colorado—Targeting High Growth Reemployment Opportunities for those Affected by Shifting Military Investments: The State of Colorado received a BRAC NEG in anticipation of the transfer of an Army unit from Fort Hood (Texas) to Fort Carson (Colorado Springs). While the actual unit transfer was delayed, the grant resources were used more broadly to develop innovative approaches to training and employment services for military spouses and other constituencies affected by the ongoing realignment of military investments. Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) staff identified the need for training and certifications that were transportable and would serve a population that is often relocated and transient. This presented the unique challenge of identifying a growth

sector that could be relevant nationally with potential employment opportunities in multiple labor markets.

Upon receipt of funding, CDLE staff and the local One-Stop Career Center partnered with a community college, a national staffing agency, and two military establishments to address this training challenge. The partnership decided to focus training resources on the information technology (IT) field for a variety of reasons:

- Employment potential across multiple industries;
- Projected national growth potential in many relevant occupations;
- Documented opportunities for women, to better target military spouses;
- Reliance on industry-recognized certifications, which maximizes skill portability; and
- Opportunity to use flexible training designs and modalities.

Drawing on these key considerations, the BRAC NEG supported the design and development of the Women in Technology program. The program was comprised of five distinct IT certifications (e.g., IT Fundamentals, Network Essentials, IT Security). If combined, the five certifications were equal to one year's worth of work toward an Associate's Degree in information technology.

Each of the courses was a week long, and after two to six courses, depending on the content area, the trainee would earn a certification. This modularized course structure and the condensed course schedule were critical for military spouses who faced ever-changing circumstances at home. Using a modularized curriculum, a student could conceivably complete and receive credit for the courses for the first two certifications and then take time off if personal or family issues arose. The individual could then re-enroll and not lose the credit for the work that had been completed.

Effective Practices in Adult Education Adopted by Colorado's Women in Technology Program

- *A modularized course structure*
- *A condensed course schedule*
- *Certification-based instruction*
- *Curriculum that was accessible for the skill level of interested workers*

The NEG supported three cycles of the Women in Technology program. After the third round of training, the local community college inherited ownership of the curriculum in order to institutionalize the program and offer it to a broader population.

Innovations in Existing Programs that Target Growth Sectors and Occupations

Grantees in Colorado and Wisconsin have focused NEG resources on workforce investment strategies that proactively target training on growing occupations and industries. Their aim is to increase workers' capacity to find jobs and continue in careers long after their initial placement. In pursuit of this goal, Arapahoe Douglas Works! (ADW), a WIB located just outside of Denver, in Colorado administers a tiered ITA system that creates incentives for training in growth sectors. South Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board prioritizes training resources to occupations where career pathways exist for low-skilled workers.

> *"Colorado will invest in Sector initiatives in an ongoing effort to create a talent pipeline that meets the needs of Colorado's businesses for a skilled workforce and to align with DOL's direction for occupational clusters and regionalism."*
>
> *– CDLE Directive*

Colorado—High Growth Occupations and Aligned Individual Training Accounts: ADW implemented a tiered ITA policy in 2008 to formalize a policy of targeting training investments to high growth sectors. ADW's initiative provides an incentive in the form of training dollars to those individuals pursuing training in high demand industries as opposed to those in lower demand industries.

"High demand" industries are defined locally by WIB staff based on comprehensive analysis of available local, State, and national data. This analysis is updated every six months to help ensure that the list of demand industries is dynamic and reflects actual business conditions. Currently, maximum ITA awards are available to support training in several high demand sectors including healthcare, information technology, finance, and aerospace.

In addition to analyzing the industries in demand, ADW's labor market analyst also identifies saturated occupations within these industries. Training for saturated occupations is generally not funded unless the worker can demonstrate that an employer is planning to hire the candidate upon completion of training.

This policy was first used in conjunction with NEG resources in late 2008 when ADW began enrolling dislocated workers affected by the closing of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) at the Lowry Campus in Denver. The population affected by the DFAS closing can be broadly characterized as highly experienced in financial analysis (average tenure of over 20 years) but limited in its mobility due to experience with only defense-specific software tools. To maximize their future career opportunities, participants used

ITA funds to take more generically applicable finance courses offered by local community colleges. Because the finance industry had already been designated a "high demand industry," dislocated workers were able to access the maximum amount of ITA resources to support their training efforts. ADW staff supported the workers by conducting skill assessments and providing counseling and coaching services.

Arapahoe Douglas Works! Tiered ITA Training Limits

	Training	*Books & Supplies*
Demand Industries	*$6,000*	*$3,000*
Non-Demand Industries	*$4,000*	*$1,500*

Wisconsin—Prioritizing High Growth Industries and Aligned Career Pathways: The Workforce Development Board (WBD) of South Central Wisconsin has developed a policy that only allows for WIA investments to be made in training that leads to employment in industries experiencing regional growth. This policy was implemented in 2006 but has been in development for many years. In the late 1990s, the WDB funded a study to develop methods for establishing career pathways. These methods were first tested as part of an NEG awarded to Wisconsin in response to a dislocation at Perry Judd's Holdings Inc., a commercial lithographic printer based in Sauk County. Under this NEG, WDB staff identified a growing need for entry level healthcare workers and designed a forty-eight-hour "Foundations for Healthcare " class to help dislocated workers gain basic skills they would need to transition into these positions. Since that NEG, the WDB has continued to emphasize sector-specific training initiatives for all workers. The experience from these initiatives has cumulatively led the WDB to establish its current career pathways training policy that now applies to all NEGs.

This policy emphasizes that entry-level positions must lead to more advanced career opportunities with additional training or experience. To actively support this policy, WDB staff have developed and articulated a set of **career pathways** in a variety of target industries including:

- Advanced Manufacturing;
- Healthcare;
- Biotechnology;
- Utilities;
- Agriculture; and
- Construction.

This strategy was designed to increase the reemployment potential of dislocated workers and to increase their retention rate in the industries in which they were trained. Prior to the new policy, a notable proportion of training participants either dropped out or left their new field of employment within the first few years because they were unsatisfied with their career choice. This came to light as staff recognized a trend of former participants reenrolling for additional services. Establishing career pathways and coaching dislocated workers about the long-term employment conditions and opportunities in an industry leads to individuals being better informed about their training decision and more likely to be satisfied with the resulting employment opportunities.

Identified Career Pathways in Advanced Manufacturing

- *Machinist*
- *Electronic Technician*
- *Welder*
- *Tool and Die Maker*
- *Mechanical Engineer*
- *CADD Drafting Technician*
- *Production Supervisor*
- *Computer Technician*

WDB's career pathways were identified in conjunction with cross-industry partners comprised of over 100 employers. Target occupations are first identified through industry projections data and then verified with participating employers. Employers, staff from WDB, and staff from the technical college work together to design and customize training curricula that fully align with the career pathways. This occupational and training information allows dislocated workers and all WIA-eligible individuals to proactively examine the career trajectories and growth potential before making a personal investment in job training.

REEMPLOYMENT THROUGH NEG PROMISING PRACTICES

Effective implementation of **strategies that place emphasis on high growth sectors and occupations** can help to maximize the reemployment success of dislocated workers. Greater emphasis on high growth opportunities helps to better target NEG resources to reflect employers' current and longer-term skill development and hiring needs. This in turn gives participants the opportunity to make enrollment decisions based on information and training options that provide enhanced reemployment opportunities and improved longer-term career potential.

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