



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR



NATIONAL EMERGENCY GRANT PROMISING PRACTICES SERIES: IMPLEMENTING TRANSITION TEAMS TO LEAD THE DISLOCATION RESPONSE

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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

When large numbers of workers lose their jobs, the affected workforce must endure the economic pressures resulting from lost income. The impact, however, does not end here. The secondary effects radiate to families, communities, and economic regions, resulting in an economic crisis that is broad in scope. This NEG promising practices blueprint explains how partnering with key stakeholders from the workforce system can improve the likelihood of dislocated workers accessing needed services and support resources provided through NEGs and other leveraged funds. These teams are instrumental in enhancing communication and collaboration amongst service providers and leaders in the community.

While transition teams may vary in membership, scope, and mission, their integral purpose is to provide a coordinated response to major layoffs. The effective execution of a transition team can enhance a NEG project in all stages of its lifespan:

- ✚ *Infrastructure and Readiness.* Systems in place that facilitate communication and allow for coordination amongst partners will lead to the more efficient use of available resources as well as an increased potential for the establishment of lasting infrastructure or processes.
- ✚ *Planning and Start-up.* The use of transition teams can broaden the stakeholder base to support NEG planning. With this increased capacity comes the improved likelihood of regional integration, leveraging of community resources, and a greater understanding of the needs of the impacted population.
- ✚ *Program Design and Implementation.* Transition teams can improve availability of information about the affected workforce as well as maximize enrollment through focused outreach efforts. The information these teams provide will give the displaced workers greater access to resources for education, training, and supportive services and will enable the workers to make more informed decisions regarding their plan to achieve reemployment.

Three broad types of transition teams have emerged and provide a framework for the discussion that follows:

- ✚ *Workforce transition teams.* The purpose of these teams is to improve outreach, recruitment, and the provision of services to laid off workers in order to ultimately assist them in returning to employment. The membership of the teams generally includes leadership from company management, the workforce, and, when the company is unionized, labor organizations working closely with workforce development staff.
- ✚ *Community transition teams.* These leadership teams mobilize key community stakeholders to plan, organize, and gather resources to assist not only laid off workers but also other local residents who have been directly or indirectly hurt

by layoffs. Team members generally include representatives from a wide range of community organizations including the provision of supportive services such as transportation and childcare resources, educational institutions, and health care providers. These teams may focus on providing a wide variety of ancillary supports to workers and community members that enable affected workers to participate in retaining and employment opportunities and align with the broader reemployment effort.

- ✚ *Economic transition teams.* Economic transition teams assess the regional impact of major dislocations and seek to develop an alternative economic future. Team members generally include regional economic development specialists, business and labor stakeholders, and political leaders. These teams support the reemployment effort by trying to prevent or minimize layoffs, developing alternative economic opportunities, and providing intelligence to dislocated workers programs on potential areas for future growth occupations.

Learning from NEG Grantees: This blueprint discusses how NEG grantees developed and implemented transition teams that provided leadership in responding to economic dislocation that affected in the workplace, community, and region at large. Insights are drawn from five grantees:

Oregon. Local teams were organized in response to large-scale dislocations in 2005 at **Hewlett-Packard** in Corvallis, affecting approximately 500 workers, and at **Amalgamated Sugar** in Nyssa, where 160 jobs were lost. Both were supported by State Rapid Response policy, which provides technical and financial assistance to form joint labor-management worker transition teams. NEG Award Amount: \$1,302,337 and \$540,816, respectively.

North Carolina. The 2003 **Pillowtex** closing in Kannapolis involved the loss of 4,800 jobs in a “company town.” Local governmental agencies and community organizations in the region formed a leadership team and began to plan a response by assessing the community-wide implications of the mass layoffs. Ultimately the team formed an on-site Community Service Center (CSC), which became the focal point of reemployment and support services. NEG Award Amount: \$20,655,048 million.

Maine. The shutdown of **Great Northern Paper’s** two mills in 2003 had a devastating impact on the rural communities of Millinocket and East Millinocket, affecting a total of 1,100 workers in “the town that paper made.” A team was formed and gained significant traction when membership expanded to the local Community Action Program and the local workforce training organization as well as other community

members. This created the leadership nucleus needed to implement the NEG and to sustain community support efforts. NEG Award Amount: \$9,298,121.

Missouri. In the St. Louis metropolitan region, local and State economic development leaders created a task force in response to an announcement of the planned closing of a major **Ford Motor Company** plant and one of its main suppliers, **Lear Corporation**. In order to assist workers being laid off, a workforce transition team was also created when the actual plant closing was later announced. NEG Award Amount: \$1,938,618.

The discussion that follows provides more information on each example, including the teams' mission, membership, division of responsibilities, accomplishments, and key lessons learned.

WORKFORCE TRANSITION TEAMS

Oregon—Lessons from Hewlett-Packard and Amalgamated Sugar: Workforce transition teams are shaped by policy from Oregon's Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, which manages the WIA programs. Departmental guidelines provide for the technical and financial assistance needed to set up worker transition teams in anticipation of a major layoff. The primary goals of the teams are to "assist in expediting basic worker transition services" in order to reduce time lost from work, minimize income loss, reduce the length of time that workers receive unemployment benefits, and speed up workers' transition to next steps.

State guidelines for use of WIA set-aside funds specifically address the formation of transition team working committees and allowable activities. In addition to these written guidelines, the State also provides on-site technical assistance and guidance in forming teams. This technical assistance places particular emphasis on the importance of team formation *prior to* the actual dislocation so as to support the management of pre-layoff activities and to maximize time available for planning activities and services that follow the layoff.

Potential Functions of a Workforce Transition Team

- *Personalizing workers' transition services*
- *Designing and organizing pre-layoff transition activities*
- *Promoting healthy worker and management relationships*
- *Serving as an information conduit*
- *Identifying resources for personal problems and improving morale*
- *Maintaining contact with workers and providing information*

—*"Rapid Response 101" Resource Guide, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development*

Two workforce transition teams were organized in response to large-scale dislocations supported by NEGs in Oregon. One transition team was formed to address the needs of a highly technical workforce that was laid off from a Hewlett-Packard facility in Corvallis. The other was formed to support the closure of Amalgamated Sugar, a manufacturing facility in a remote part of eastern Oregon on the Idaho border. State guidelines specify that transition team membership include worker and management representatives and also offer criteria for selecting individuals from among those who volunteer for the team. As can be seen in the exhibit on the previous page, State guidelines summarize prospective job functions that provide the basis for reviewing and screening of potential candidates. At the same time, the guidelines emphasize the importance of selecting candidates with various “intangible” qualities (see exhibit below) that are likely to lead to effective and credible service on a transition team.

Suggested Traits of Team Members

- *Genuinely interested in the welfare of their fellow workers*
- *Natural leaders within the organization*
- *Familiar with the way in which the organization functions*
- *Knowledgeable about the skills and capabilities of the workers*
- *Committed to the success of the overall transition effort*

—“Rapid Response 101” Resource Guide, Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development

The Amalgamated Sugar transition team was comprised of twelve people who met regularly for a year. The Hewlett-Packard transition team met in person several times; however, since the H-P employees preferred electronic communications, it evolved over time into more of a “virtual” team.

At the Amalgamated Sugar NEG project, each team member had regular contact with approximately 20 workers impacted by the layoff for whom he/she was personally responsible. Team members maintained regular contact with their caseload to ensure that they were fully aware of upcoming activities and resources

available through the NEG. Some team members assisted with transportation to meetings or appointments to ensure that services were received. Due to their close connection with the dislocated workers, team members also served as a source of information for project staff about the workers’ needs, such as understanding the status of their 401(k) plans, Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) health benefits, etc. Project staff members believe that team members played a vital role in getting workers to take advantage of reemployment and support services. In addition to simply increasing awareness, these team members were also able to reduce the perceived stigma associated with, for instance, applying for social services or accepting donated food.

Missouri—Lessons from Ford-Lear: A workforce transition team was established in the St. Louis region to respond to the large layoffs of workers from the Ford Motor and Lear Corporation plants. Workforce transition teams are a regular part of Rapid Response support in Missouri with leadership for setting up teams and member training provided by the State American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) Dislocated Worker Program through a contract with the State workforce agency. The premise of these teams is that workers anticipating a layoff are more likely to ask knowledgeable peers or co-workers about available services and assistance programs. In unionized situations, such as Ford-Lear, AFL-CIO guidelines call for the transition team to

*Missouri's Advice on
Recruiting Transition Team
Members*

*"Circulate a flyer at the
workplace; ask for volunteers.
At information sessions, watch
the crowds, identify natural
leaders and approach them to
be on the transition team".*

*-Project Staff, Missouri
Division of Workforce Development*

be made up of union and company representatives with both groups providing input on which workers might be effective team members. The Ford-Lear transition team ultimately consisted of twenty-eight members, including the Human Resources manager from the Lear Company, two union presidents (one from Ford and one from Lear), and twenty-five workers from the plants. The AFL-CIO Dislocated Worker Program also sets up transition teams at non-union companies.

Transition team volunteers in the Ford-Lear project were trained by the Missouri AFL-CIO staff using a protocol for team training. During the two-day session, team members learned about the types of programs and services available for dislocated workers from agencies such as the Missouri Career Center Dislocated Worker Program, Division of Employment Security, Social Security Administration, United Way, and other social service agencies. At the Ford-Lear project site, team members were introduced to representatives of local social services programs, enabling them to refer dislocated workers to a specific contact person at the appropriate agency.

The Ford-Lear transition team provided assistance to workers for sixteen months in an effort to maximize support for their reemployment. Team members' primary responsibility was to act as a communication link and information source as well as provide feedback on what service strategies were needed. They served as an informal liaison to the Missouri Division of Workforce Development and informed dislocated workers about program services and community support resources.

The workforce transition team supporting the Ford-Lear NEG project had dedicated space available in each plant to meet with individual workers. Through these meetings, team members gradually recognized that their responsibilities also included dispelling rumors and correcting the misinformation that inevitably accompanies a large dislocation. The

team created a newsletter to provide an accurate source of information. These efforts helped enable the impacted workers to better focus on moving forward with retraining and reemployment services.

COMMUNITY TRANSITION TEAMS

Maine—Lessons from Great Northern Paper: The 2003 closing of Great Northern Paper was a major blow to the regional economy and community psyche in northern Maine. The 1,100 workers affected by the shutdown of two plants in this rural area lost their jobs at the beginning of the long winter season with few prospects for immediate reemployment. A community transition team was formed soon after the announced closing to help laid off workers meet the basic needs of their families for heat, shelter, food, and clothing throughout the winter. Community leaders were concerned that without this initial support the workers would not be able to focus on planning for reemployment. The team was convened by the Director of Eastern Maine Community College's Katahdin Region Higher Education Center with colleagues from the local Community Action Program and a local workforce training organization. This solidified the leadership nucleus needed to assemble and leverage community resources so as to maximize the use of NEG funds on the core training and reemployment functions.

Through the efforts of this leadership group, the community transition team was expanded to include a broad array of stakeholders, service providers, and partners including representatives from:

- Community healthcare providers;
- Representatives of the K-12 system;
- Organizations providing supportive services, such as food and fuel assistance;
- Community and faith-based representatives;
- Local banks;
- Community college and training agencies;
- Peer support workers hired under the NEG;
- Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) staff; and
- Congressional staff representing elected officials.

The team convened every two weeks for four years with meetings organized and run by a local chairperson. The primary goal of the group was to identify community resources that could support Great Northern Paper workers. The community college donated space in its new satellite facility that became the locus of NEG service delivery. In this capacity, they identified skilled adjunct faculty who could provide training targeted to the workers' needs and to regional labor market conditions. Local community and faith-based organizations provided workers with financial support, food, clothing, fuel assistance and family

counseling services. Two local medical practices applied for a Federally Qualified Health Center grant from the U.S. Public Health Service. This grant enabled workers and their families to qualify for reduced-price prescription drugs and reduced-cost medical care. Banks and credit unions worked with borrowers to help avoid foreclosure by restructuring loans to allow extending the term of the loan or requiring interest-only payments. The transition team mobilized community resources to meet workers' immediate needs and support their efforts to participating in training and other services directed to finding new employment. The team also resulted in the informal creation of a partnership infrastructure that was instrumental in implementing the NEG. The community transition team model used for Great Northern Paper was replicated with other mass layoffs in Maine and is now a standard Rapid Response practice across the State.

North Carolina—Lessons from Pillowtex: As in Maine, the community transition team in North Carolina was formed in response to the loss of a major employer. A large textile manufacturer, Pillowtex, had been the primary employer in Cabarrus and Rowan Counties for generations. In July of 2003 the plant was closed, resulting in 4,300 individuals in the two counties losing their jobs. This was the single largest mass layoff in North Carolina history, and it immediately impacted the entire community. Over forty percent of individuals in the two counties had a relative who was directly affected by the layoff.

In April and May 2003, after Pillowtex notified State officials that mass layoffs were likely, local governmental agencies and community organizations in the region began to consider the community-wide implications of a large-scale dislocation. This effort was spearheaded by a core planning group that included the Cabarrus County Department of Social Services (CCDSS), the Central Carolina Workforce Development Board, and community-based organizations with regular input from Pillowtex representatives. The planning group assessed the needs of Pillowtex workers and found the following: nearly half the workforce had less than a high school education, 500 workers were non-English speaking, average indebtedness (excluding mortgages) ranged between \$2,000 and \$9,000, and ninety-three percent were unlikely to be able to access health insurance benefits.¹ It was clear that workers' human service needs were extensive and could significantly impede their reemployment efforts. In addition, their collective needs had the potential to overwhelm existing agency facilities and resources.

In response to this workforce assessment, the core planning group cast a wide and inclusive net in its effort to engage the participation and support of community stakeholders in planning for the immediate needs of workers following layoff. While input from the workforce assessment was used in the preparation of the NEG application, it is important to note that the team viewed this needs analysis as an ongoing process. Specifically, the

¹ M. Beatty et al. Community Response to the Pillowtex Textile Kannapolis Closing: The "Rapid Response" Team as a Facilitative Device. University of North Carolina, 2004.

community team was conceptualized as a constantly evolving resource whose focus and breadth would expand as more was understood about the existing education level, skills sets, and training needs of former Pillowtex workers. Through an informal schedule of meetings and the sustained involvement of the core planning group a concerted effort was made to identify and coordinate services as the needs of the workforce were further identified. Key community team members were representatives of:

- ✚ The Community Development Corporation;
- ✚ United Way of Central Carolinas;
- ✚ A leading public health care provider in the region, Cabarrus Health Alliance, and other local health and mental health service providers;
- ✚ Faith-based organizations, including Cooperative Christian Ministries;
- ✚ Consumer credit, budget, and mortgage counseling organizations;
- ✚ The Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services (Food Stamps) programs;
- ✚ Community colleges;
- ✚ Central Carolina Workforce Development Board; and
- ✚ JobLink Career Center.

Additionally, State staff organized a meeting of representatives from the five community colleges in the area. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the system's capacity, resources, and readiness to support the re-training and educational needs of the displaced workforce. Information from this meeting and input from the community transition team helped to shape the planning and implementation of training provided through the NEG. Nearly seventy percent of the workforce resided in the service area of the Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC). Workforce demographic data indicated that Pillowtex workers were generally older and functioning at a lower level of education than the RCCC's student body as a whole. While it was anticipated that the community college system would have the capacity to develop and deliver the types of training needed by the of Pillowtex workers, the large demand for new training options meant that NEG resources were needed to secure additional space and equipment.

RCCC initially focused on offering basic skills courses to nearly 600 workers, including English as a Second Language and General Education Development (GED) preparation. Another 600 workers enrolled in occupational training, including sixty-five who completed nurse's aide training. RCCC also utilized NEG funds to develop non-credit programs that reflected workers interests and labor market opportunities in such areas as Pharmacy Technician, Medical Coding and Billing, Medical Unit Secretary, General Construction Trades, and Customer Service Certification.

The advanced planning of the local community transition team also resulted in the creation of a Community Service Center (CSC), which brought together the services of nine public and private human services agencies in a church located across the street from the plant. The CSC opened four days after the official announcement of the Pillowtex closing. Practitioners and planners from North Carolina identified a number of factors that contributed to the overall success of the CSC, including:

- ✚ *Proximity to reemployment services.* The CSC was located near the plant where a One-Stop Career Center satellite operated; thus it was able to ensure a direct, visible, and convenient link to reemployment support.
- ✚ *Visible community-wide leadership.* The CSC was operated cooperatively by the Cabarrus County Department of Social Services (CCDSS) and Cooperative Christian Ministries. The CCDSS provided Food Stamps, Medicaid, and other financial assistance to Pillowtex workers. Financial assistance was also provided by Cooperative Christian Ministries, Cabarrus Regional Urban Ministries, and the Salvation Army. The Cabarrus Community Development Corporation and Consumer Credit Counseling offered budget and mortgage counseling, and the Cabarrus Health Alliance, Piedmont Behavioral Health and North East Medical Center provided health care services.
- ✚ *Use of expanded eligibility.* The CCDSS broadened eligibility for federal assistance programs from 150 to 200 percent of the federal poverty level so as to expand the reach of these supports. This expansion helped to provide needed support for workers enrolled in the training provided by NEG and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) funds.
- ✚ *Seamless service delivery.* The CSC coordinated intake and assessment procedures for multiple programs available to the affected workforce including the services administered by the CCDSS described above. A shared intake form was designed and used for services provided through the NEG, TAA, the community college, and the CCDSS. This streamlining not only made the enrollment process easier for workers, it also allowed program staff to more effectively share information on participants, services being provided, and potentially unmet needs.
- ✚ *Service coordination.* An integrated service delivery system enabled clients to seamlessly access multiple services at the CSC site. Clients completed a single financial application that was used to determine eligibility for means-tested public benefits and other types of financial assistance. Based on a review of the financial application, CSC staff followed a protocol to refer Pillowtex workers to the appropriate services. Staff maintained an activity log that recorded referral

information and details about services provided, including the dollar amount of any funds expended. Both regular meetings and the co-location of resources within the CSC allowed staff to maintain a high level of knowledge and awareness of available service opportunities and how they would best support the reemployment needs of NEG participants.

- ✚ *Staff training.* CSC staff received training from representatives of all the partner agencies as well as church leaders who knew many of the affected population. Emphasis was placed on cross-training staff so that they were well-versed in services provided through the TAA and WIA programs. The training was facilitated by an Employment Analyst with the North Carolina Employment Security Commission who had experience in coordinating TAA and WIA services. The CSC also utilized staff members who were experienced in either the TAA or WIA programs to train less experienced personnel. Cross-training was complicated by the fact that the Pillowtex closing occurred as new TAA regulations were being implemented with some workers eligible under old TAA provisions and others under the new law. CSC staff worked closely with the regional TAA Director to incorporate regulatory changes into the training content. Cross-training ultimately enabled CSC staff and volunteers to gain insight into both the array of community resources and training opportunities. This in turn allowed them to better connect Pillowtex workers with appropriate services that best supported their personal needs and reemployment plans.
- ✚ *Ongoing communication.* A combination of physical proximity, cross training, and common commitment fostered an ongoing level of communication that was essential to the effectiveness of the CSC. Most notably, this ensured that all resource options were fully identified and utilized (WIA, TAA, private, community).

Based on the Pillowtex experience and the success of the CSC, Community Service Delivery Forums are now routinely utilized by the North Carolina Rapid Response team to help organize community members and resources in response to large closings. These forums typically include representatives from State and local WIA offices, the Department of Community Colleges, Department of Health and Human Services, Regional United Way and Goodwill Industries, local city and county officials and staff, economic developers, chamber of commerce representatives, and faith- and community-based organization representatives. Any citizen who expresses interest in participating on the team is also welcome to attend. The forums leverage State resources for communities experiencing major layoffs. For example, if a community identifies infrastructure concerns, State staff follow up with a team from the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Community Assistance Division. When displaced workers have mortgage problems, the State workforce staff brings in the North Carolina Finance and Housing Department and implements

informational seminars on how to obtain mortgage assistance. In this manner, all resources are brought to bear in responding to major layoffs.

ECONOMIC TRANSITION TEAMS

Missouri—Lessons from Ford-Lear:

When Ford Motor Company announced in January 2002 that it would close its Hazelwood assembly plant near St. Louis as well as other facilities in the region by mid-decade, the immediate reaction was to try to prevent the closing. The St. Louis County Economic Council, an agency that had proactively coordinated many regional development initiatives, took the lead. The Governor empowered the group by forming a high-level task force that was initially charged with identifying options for keeping the plant open. The task force's efforts were also directed at a parallel strategy to prepare for closing if retention initiatives were unsuccessful.

The task force was made up of twenty-two members including heads of major businesses, union leadership, local economic development leaders, and elected officials. The team had a two-tiered structure: the highly visible task force, populated by top civic and business leaders, and a working group, comprised of staff from key agencies and organizations. Participating agencies included the State Department of Economic Development, the City of Hazelwood, St. Louis County, the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association, and the St. Louis County Economic Council.

Lessons from the Field: Missouri's Advice on Economic Transition Teams

- *Form a high-level team of visible civic and business leaders with a working and leadership structure that allows a Project Director to effectively coordinate resources and provide direction.*
- *Govern by consensus to support the integration of resources and obtain buy-in.*
- *Use the high-level membership for top-level review, oversight, and policy decisions only; use staff for the "nitty-gritty" work.*
- *Formalize a communications plan that provides for constant contact with the press and the community. Press releases should be issued by the top-level task force to reinforce that decisions are made by that group.*
- *Develop a media strategy. Cultivate good relations with the media; know what the key issues are and how to use the media to get the most important messages out.*
- *Ensure that every person on the top-level task force is equally informed and can make fully informed decisions.*
- *Secure resources such as an economic development grant to provide staffing for the transition team and to fund surveys and other types of economic research.*
- *Use the crisis as an impetus to get things done that might not otherwise be possible, for example expanding economic development tools or rectifying legislative impediments to development.*

To support the economic development mission of the Ford-Lear transition team, Missouri applied for and received an Economic Adjustment Grant for \$500,000 from the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce with matching funds provided by the affected cities, the county, and the State. The grant was used to support staff, conduct impact analyses and research, and identify potential responses. Three possible strategies were identified and pursued: a) try to persuade Ford to reverse its decision, b) find another manufacturer to use the facility and skill base, and c) diversify into other industries.

The Missouri task force and working committees operated for about two years. Over this timeframe the group had to shift its emphasis as Ford abandoned an initial 2003 decision to keep the plant open. Mounting financial pressures over the ensuing two years ultimately resulted in a final announcement of closing, which eventually took place in 2006. Nevertheless, the task force research on diversification did prove to be informative for economic development planning after the plant closure.

The work of the task force and working group also laid the foundation for the NEG project that followed. Since connections had already been made with representatives from the United Auto Workers and the two companies, it was easier for State workforce development staff to gather information and begin the needed planning process with union and company leaders. Additionally, a great deal of the data collected by the working group was used to prepare the NEG application and to design services for workers from the two companies. The working group requested data from the State labor market information office to help identify “crossover” skills, that is, competencies that laid off workers could bring to potential new industries that were targeted as a part of the economic recovery planning. The Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (MERIC) analyzed workers’ skills and prepared crosswalks of skills to targeted occupations. This innovation has evolved to be an ongoing, and now online, service for dislocated workers in Missouri.

REEMPLOYMENT THROUGH NEG PROMISING PRACTICES

Transition teams, whether primarily focused on the workforce, community, or regional economy, allow for a more efficient and informed planning process by broadening the stakeholder base and engaging the expertise and energy of an array of community resources. This improves the likelihood of a comprehensive program response that reflects the far-reaching ramifications of a major dislocation. In addition to a more coordinated and broad-based planning process, the formation of transition teams improves the likelihood that the displaced workers are aware and will take advantage of the support network that can help to ease a stressful transition and expedite their reemployment success.

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