

Southwest Ohio Career Resource Network

Best Practices in Moving Forward

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Prepared for Cincinnati Community Action Now (CAN)

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Cincinnati Community Action Now (CAN) was charged by Mayor Charlie Luken to identify and drive actions that provide greater equity, opportunity and inclusion for everyone in Cincinnati. Cincinnati CAN does this by addressing the disparities that impact people in need, particularly in the African-American community. Cincinnati CAN's work is focused on making a substantial and sustainable difference in the targeted areas of employment, educational achievement, healthcare, and the treatment of African-Americans by the police and justice system.



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The National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC), founded in 1969, is a national, non-profit, public interest organization that specializes in community economic development. It works in collaboration with community organizations, private foundations, corporations and government agencies to build the human, social, and economic capacities of low-income communities and their residents. NEDLC helps to create both strong, sustainable community institutions that can act as "change agents," and an effective local infrastructure for their support.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From October 2002 to January 2003, the National Economic Development and Law Center conducted a study of the Southwest Ohio Career Resource Network (SWOCCRN) for Cincinnati Community Action Now (CAN) with support from the Ford Foundation. This study was in no way intended to be an in-depth evaluation of the SWOCCRN. Rather, the aim of the study and this resultant report is to support the continuous improvement efforts already set in motion by leaders and stakeholders of the SWOCCRN. As such, this report includes research findings from a basic assessment of the SWOCCRN along with a series of recommendations and associated best practices that can serve as a roadmap for future SWOCCRN development. The CAN will share this report with SWOCCRN stakeholders and other interested parties, and it will use the report in its community planning work, to be a value-added partner in the area of workforce development.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

In developing this report, the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) first set out to understand how the SWOCCRN operates and serves its customers, and then we identified best practices to assist SWOCCRN stakeholders in addressing problem areas. The research methodology for this study included:

- 1) **Qualitative research** based on interviews and focus groups with 37 SWOCCRN stakeholders and customers, as well as site visits to four SWOCCRN centers.
- 2) **Quantitative data review** of job seeker customer outcomes.
- 3) **Literature review** of SWOCCRN related materials and reports on Workforce Investment Act/One-Stop best practices.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

As outlined in the full report, there have been some strong SWOCCRN successes and many improvement efforts have already begun to tackle problem areas. The summary findings listed here highlight the main priorities for change in the SWOCCRN according to each of the stakeholder groups interviewed. By clarifying the areas for improvement, some of which – as mentioned before – have begun to be addressed, we make the case for the report's recommendations, best practices, and new models to consider in the SWOCCRN's development.

Job Seeker Customers

- Increase volume and variety of job listings
- Improve customer service and follow up
- Streamline enrollment process for services – especially for training
- Offer more training opportunities
- Offer weekend hours

Business Customers

- Increase number of referrals of job seekers for job openings
- Improve screening and matching of job candidates
- Offer more soft-skills training and assistance with work supports for entry-level candidates
- Implement more technology in offering services (e.g., computerized job matching system)
- Offer more assistance placing laid off employees
- Improve follow up from SWOCCRN staff

- Improve coordination/partnering with other local employment service organizations
- Increase outreach to small and medium sized businesses

SWOOCRN Management and Operations Staff

- Clarify and improve internal leadership, organization, procedures, and communication
- Improve satellite center services, resources, and coordination
- Consider new locations for the centers
- Improve ITA policies and process
- Emphasize clear outcomes and performance measures in contract development/negotiation
- Improve communication and cooperation between City and County jurisdictions, Workforce Policy Board, and ACS (the SWOOCRN operator)
- Emphasize partnering with community workforce and human service organizations, particularly those that are co-located at the SWOOCRN
- Implement staff training in case management, follow up, labor market information, and WIA regulations/service approach
- Increase outreach and services to businesses (by specific industries), resulting in more job listings
- Improve customer flow

Strategic Partners

- Increase emphasis on outcomes, reduce emphasis on paperwork and data input issues
- Improve leadership in implementing Workforce Investment Act changes to the Southwest Ohio workforce system
- Increase partnering efforts between SWOOCRN operator and community organizations
- Consider new locations for the centers
- Improve marketing, outreach, and quality of services offered to engage business and job seeker customers

Education and Employment Training Providers

- Update list of training vendors and include information on performance measures and other details to facilitate customer choice
- Improve the ITA enrollment and referral system
- Improve communication between SWOOCRN staff and training providers (e.g., offer opportunities, such as trainings and presentations, to mutually share information)
- Increase SWOOCRN staff participation in existing workforce networks and associations and focus on ways to collaborate
- Increase the SWOOCRN's ability to serve the specialized needs of highly skilled as well as multi-barriered job seekers

Workforce Policy Board Members

- Improve SWOOCRN governance by clarifying roles and coordinating less burdensome monitoring
- Focus on results and performance measures, rather than bureaucratic process
- Support WPB's focus on developing systems and policies
- Improve ACS/SWOOCRN operations leadership
- Engage other investment (public and private) in the SWOOCRN beyond just WIA funds
- Improve outreach and process flow to increase the numbers of job seeker and business customers served
- Increase services to small businesses as well as large businesses
- Improve ability to serve various types of job seekers with different skill levels
- Assess the locations of the centers – but focus on having at least one fully functioning center

City of Cincinnati

- Focus on supporting a fully functioning main center to address the range of job seeker and business customer needs

- In the future, assess the locations of the centers
- Increase the SWOCRN's visibility, interaction, and services to job seeker and business customers
- Improve ACS/SWOCRN operations leadership
- Support WPB's strong involvement
- Advocate at the state level to release Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES) information to facilitate tracking of job seeker customers
- Streamline SWOCRN operator contracting and monitoring process with cooperation between the City and County
- Emphasize the linking of the City's workforce development, economic development, and business support activities under the Community Development Department

Hamilton County

- Make the most of the current SWOCRN center locations, but improve the selection process in the future
- Balance WIA intensive customer needs with business customer needs
- Increase outreach and engagement of business customers (especially in the region and small and large businesses)
- Build SWOCRN staff's capacity in relation to labor market information/analysis and workforce expertise
- Increase outreach to job seeker customers
- Improve assessment of job seeker customers for intensive and training services
- Improve record keeping and tracking
- Improve ACS/SWOCRN operations leadership
- Increase cooperation between the City and County to more efficiently monitor contracts with ACS
- Support WPB's active role in formulating vision and policy

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Several of the recommendations outlined in the full version of this report come directly from the interviewed stakeholders, while the other recommendations are provided by NEDLC based on its analysis of the research findings and its role as a national workforce development expert. Efforts were made to match a best practice model with each of the recommendations to help guide implementation – however, this was not always possible. It should be noted that some of the best practice models cited in the report have been successful for reasons and conditions that do not apply to the SWOCRN such as:

- Use of diverse funding streams to complement Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds (SWOCRN is currently supported solely by WIA funds).
- Early implementation of WIA or One-Stop operations (SWOCRN was implemented in 2000, with a new operator and satellites in 2002).
- Regional WIA structures which pool resources of several counties (SWOCRN currently serves the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County only).
- In different sized cities with different demographics than Cincinnati.

Despite these differences, these models were included because they represent a vision for the SWOCRN to potentially strive towards, or because pieces of these models may be more immediately replicable or progressively implemented in Southwest Ohio.

The recommendations and best practices presented here are intended to assist with the continuous improvement process that is already in motion, led by SWOCRN leaders and partners. All of the SWOCRN stakeholders and leaders interviewed as part of this study expressed openness to examining best practices and new models to assess their applicability for addressing SWOCRN's areas

for improvement. As one WPB member put it, “we have to find things we are for, instead of just the things we are against.”

1. Administration/Governance Level Recommendations

- **1.1** *Develop a clearer vision and alignment of SWOCRN leaders about who the SWOCRN will serve and how it will be developed.*
- 1.2** *Continue efforts to increase cooperation in negotiating contracts with the SWOCRN operator and to improve coordination of monitoring these contracts.*
- 1.3** *Support a full-time executive for the Workforce Policy Board (WPB) that is not associated with local government.*
- 1.4** *Involve the WPB in developing a strategy for SWOCRN business customer services.*
(Best Practice Models: San Diego, CA; Louisville, KY; Dallas, TX; Boston, MA)
- 1.5** *Improve integration of the County's and City's workforce and economic development activities with the SWOCRN.*
(Best Practice Models: Santa Ana, CA; North Charleston, SC)
- 1.6** *Engage investment of other resources besides WIA funds to support the SWOCRN.*
- 1.7** *If SWOCRN leaders consider new locations for the SWOCRN main center and satellites in the future, set up a committee of stakeholders and establish criteria for an effective selection process.*
(Best Practice Models: Burlington, VT; Santa Clara, CA)
- 1.8** *Advocate at the state level to release Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES) information to the SWOCRN to facilitate tracking customers.*

2. Program/Operations Level Recommendations

- 2.1** *Consider implementing an automated job matching system and expanding services on the SWOCRN web site to include job postings, labor market information, and human resources information.*
(Best Practice Models: Santa Ana, CA; San Diego, CA; Minnesota; Aberdeen, WA)
- 2.2** *Invest in SWOCRN staff training and cross-training opportunities.*
(Best Practice Model: Pittsburgh, PA)
- 2.3** *Improve job seeker customer flow.*
- 2.4** *Continue improvements in ITA system.*
(Best Practice Models: Orlando, FL; Bridgeport, CT)
- 2.5** *Conduct an educational campaign for community based organizations and training providers about WIA regulations and SWOCRN services.*
- 2.6** *Increase partnering efforts with other workforce organizations and human services agencies.*
(Best Practice Models: Lynnwood, WA; Dayton, OH)
- 2.7** *Assign regular staff to the main center's Resource Room and Computer Lab.*
- 2.8** *Survey job seeker customers about what workshop topics they would like most for SWOCRN to offer.*
- 2.9** *Improve satellite center set up, services, and communication with the main center.*
- 2.10** *Develop targeted strategies for serving business customers in specific industries and from different sized companies, such as intensive human resources services for small and medium sized companies.*
(Best Practice Models: San Diego, CA; Louisville, KY)
- 2.11** *Focus on tracking results of business services.*
(Best Practice Models: Louisville, KY; San Diego, CA)
- 2.12** *Increase marketing efforts to business and job seeker customers.*