



Strategic Plan
2006–2008

Facilitated by:



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Executive Summary

This strategic plan is presented by the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink Leadership Council, which represents the Operator Consortium for the local CareerLink network of Comprehensive Centers and Community Centers. This plan was developed through a strategic planning process that began in the fall of 2005 with a thorough review of the previous plan and ultimately culminated in the creation of newly articulated goals, objectives and associated action steps for each. This plan will serve as a guide for the CareerLink system over the course of the next three years.

The goals are as follows:

- Goal #1: Continue to enhance the employer service model to increase utilization of CareerLink
- Goal #2: Continue to enhance the job seeker service model to better meet individual needs
- Goal #3: Create a CareerLink staff development and training program that ensures customer focused service
- Goal #4: Ensure stability and support program enhancements by expanding and diversifying the funding base
- Goal #5: Continue the development of the Pittsburgh / Allegheny County CareerLink system and ensure continuity of mission

Successful implementation of this plan will continue to depend on the commitment of time, resources and energy by the Leadership Council, hard work and dedication demonstrated by CareerLink staff and Community Center employees, and support from the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board.

Introduction

The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink Leadership Council ("Leadership Council") represents the Operator Consortium for the local CareerLink network of Comprehensive Centers and Community Centers. The Consortium is a joint venture incorporating physical and financial resources from Goodwill Industries, the City of Pittsburgh/Pittsburgh Partnership, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services/Office of Community Services, the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership, the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council, and Life'sWork of Western PA. The Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB), whose members are appointed by local elected officials, granted this Consortium's charter to operate CareerLink.

The mission of the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink, revised through the strategic planning process, is:

To provide employers and job seekers market-driven employment and career services in an integrated, universally accessible setting

The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink strives to make the CareerLink network a primary mechanism to meet the employment and skill improvement needs of the region's employers and workers. Rather than focus on individual agency or program needs, a truly integrated system has evolved. Features that differentiate the system from others around Pennsylvania and the nation include:

- Successful integration of city and county workforce investment areas into a single, unified CareerLink delivery system
- A network of Comprehensive and Community Centers across the region that provide convenient access to a range of services
- Extensive cost sharing, with partners jointly funding key staff positions, training, and marketing, in addition to rent and some administrative activities
- Standard customer flow at each Comprehensive Center, with staff organized by function, not agency
- Jointly funded and hired Comprehensive Center managers, who are responsible for operational oversight

The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink is proud of the continued success, but is not complacent. Opportunities to innovate and improve are actively sought. In this spirit, a formal strategic planning process was conducted in 2005 to review goals and priorities from the 2002-2005 Strategic Plan and to craft a new plan for the next three years. The process involved a series of intensive meetings of a planning group comprised of Leadership Council members, CareerLink managers, supervisors, staff, and Community Centers employees. Strategy Solutions, Inc., a business development firm based in Erie, PA, facilitated these meetings and assisted with the writing of the plan.

To implement the objectives/strategies of the previous (2002-2005) Strategic Plan, individual teams were formed that focused on addressing specific elements of the plan's four goals. At the start of this planning process, team representatives reviewed and reported on their progress before moving forward with the development of a new strategic plan. Following the progress reports, each team identified next steps required to continue to enhance system performance. This fueled the process of defining our goals and objectives for the next three years.

Through additional planning and follow-up meetings, the focus progressively narrowed to identify specific action steps for each team to implement the goals and objectives in the new plan. For the 2005-2008 Strategic Plan, our focus is to continue to move system performance to the "next level."

Goal #1: Continue to enhance the employer service model to increase utilization of CareerLink

Over the past several years, targeted outreach, customer service and follow up with specific employers in selected industry clusters has been a key priority through a dedicated employer service team. Our local CareerLink system developed a method of relationship building and customer service for employers in target industry clusters along with a proprietary database to identify, track and monitor activities and outcomes of these efforts.

This employer service delivery model has become increasingly effective in serving targeted businesses through the formalization of the model across the CareerLink system. We are using labor market information and new tools to be strategic in our outreach to employers. For instance, our database allows us to measure how we are doing by conducting market penetration analyses, ensuring that the services we are providing are being not only utilized by a wide range of industries, but are also being valued by each.

Initially, there were five industry clusters identified as critical to the regional labor market: healthcare, hospitality & tourism, financial services, information technology and manufacturing. In addition to these, the past three years have brought some additional industry sectors into the CareerLink system, including temporary employment agencies, retail, security agencies, manufacturers, construction and transportation. During the strategic planning process, a number of additional industry sectors considered crucial to fostering continued growth and future success of CareerLink were identified. These include biomedical, business and financial operations, gaming and education. Continued enhancement of the model will ensure that CareerLink better serves these additional industry sectors.

Specific objectives in support of this goal include ongoing efforts by the Employer team to work on process, procedure and protocol delivery improvements of the employer service model to ensure consistency in its delivery across the system. The Employer team will develop a training outline for all employer contact staff on customer service skills, the tool kit and website sources of labor market data (e.g., CWIA, thomasnet.com, etc.) to ensure continued, high-quality outreach efforts and employer relationship management. Training on the Employer Contact Management system will be provided to all staff to ensure consistency of data collection and information tracking across all sites.

In addition, a system to ensure that all staff members are held accountable for “world class” customer service is in development. The Assessment team expects to survey employers, temporary employment agencies and other current clients regarding the types of assessment tools that are most valuable and gather feedback on the tools needed. After the assessment tools are identified and selected, the Employer and Assessment teams will establish a fee structure for them and begin marketing them to employers.

Supervisory training to effectively monitor the delivery of employer services is also a key component of the implementation of this objective.

In addition to enhancing the service delivery model, this goal includes an objective to increase active outreach to employers. This will be a key focus of the Employer team, along with the Site Administrators, as they will create standards for employer contacts.

The Employer team is developing a process to maximize utilization of job listings/system usage of the current CareerLink employer base. In addition, they will assist the Marketing team to improve the employer sections of careerlinkpittsburgh.com and develop formal outreach plans that will include employers, Chambers of Commerce, Human Resource associations and targeted clusters, including WIB representation. Following that, the Employer team will provide more in-depth recruiting and screening services to employers in targeted industries. To measure the success of this objective, the Employer team expects to conduct focus groups with employers to determine if CareerLink is effectively meeting their needs.

Also in support of this goal, the Employer team will define high-demand, high-growth occupations in individual clusters, identify specific employers in those clusters and obtain analyses of labor market trends.

To enhance workshops for employers, the Employer team will develop an outline for employer workshops. By conducting a needs assessment survey, topics of interest to employers will be identified. A quarterly workshop schedule based on the highest priorities will be developed.

The final objective for this goal is to improve the employer contact system and to standardize reporting. To do this, the Employer team will assess the depth of penetration of job listings and system usage among current CareerLink employers, report the numbers of employer contacts to leadership and improve the report content of the employer contact manager system.

Overall, enhancement to the employer service model is expected to result in more job postings in the system, drawing more applicants and, ultimately, expanding the overall penetration of the CareerLink system in the marketplace.

Goal #2: Continue to enhance job seeker service model to better meet individual needs

As part of the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink commitment to customers, the job seeker service model strives to provide universal access, regardless of age, race, gender, education level, ability or special needs. With core services effectively providing a high level of accessibility, the heart of this goal is to focus more on the individual needs of job seekers as they move through the CareerLink system. The value of career planning for all sectors of the labor force, from students to entry-level employees to experienced professionals making career transitions, will continue to be emphasized.

Over the past year, efforts to improve the job seeker delivery system have resulted in the development of an initial assessment and triage process for job seekers. This process is called the Personal Employment Guide or the PEG system. Developed and piloted over the past several years, this system provides for an initial contact with job seekers, along with an assessment and personal action plan to guide job seekers to access and utilize the CareerLink and other community resources that are most appropriate and will provide the most benefit to them. A key priority for this plan is to implement this process throughout the system. A dedicated Implementation team, has been formed to implement this objective. Part of the implementation efforts will include development of a plan to refer individuals with support service needs to appropriate resources outside of the CareerLink system if necessary.

A database is currently in development to assist with and provide the Personal Employment Guide documentation. This software will be beta-tested prior to the system-wide implementation of the PEG method.

The Job Seeker team is also committed to identifying the essential job duties and responsibilities needed to provide quality customer service through all steps in the customer flow. In order to accomplish this, the Staff Development team will create a formal training program to address the Personal Employment Guide skill set. The System Coordination team will analyze data from the Personal Employment Guide reporting system to show customer demographics and needs (including support services, business development and workshop development data), ensure reporting requirements are built into system and reform the system as recommended.

Site Administrators will survey staff for volunteers to be part of triage teams and will ultimately identify and select dedicated staff to implement the Personal Employment Guide. The Site Administrators will also design/modify other staff positions to support the overall implementation of this process.

The System Coordination team expects to implement the Personal Employment Guide process across all three comprehensive CareerLink sites. After implementation, the leadership team plans to hire a “secret shopper” company to assess their experience with the Personal Employment Guide. Secret shopper efforts will include people with a variety of needs, including persons with disabilities, to provide a clear picture of how well we have executed the Personal Employment Guide implementation.

The second objective for this goal is to study the design of the physical layout at the CareerLink sites to understand and improve customer flow. Site Administrators will work to evaluate customer flow as it relates to implementation and use of the Personal Employment Guide system and assess how well the current floor plan fits with the new flow.

Another key objective in support of this goal is to increase outreach to targeted groups and the emerging workforce. The System Coordination team will continue to identify the gap between job seekers and job orders as well as continue to identify ways to measure utilization of the system and provide feedback on performance. The Employer team will identify high-demand/high-growth occupations. The Marketing team will develop a marketing plan for the emerging workforce including people with disabilities and limited English proficiency. Job seeker marketing materials will be revised to include information in multiple formats and languages.

The Equal Opportunity team is identifying appropriate advocacy groups in order to develop relationships that bring more individuals with disabilities into the CareerLink system. In addition, this committee will create a job development list by identifying employers that have a history of hiring persons from targeted groups.

Site management and leadership will provide space and resources/counseling to professional networking groups, like PAPEN. The Job Seeker team expects to conduct a feasibility study around developing a more formal definition of the professional job seeker and make a recommendation regarding the development of professional job seeker services.

Another objective of this goal is to enhance the workshops for job seekers. To do this, an Ad-Hoc Workshop Committee will develop new workshops as they identify new employers and job seeker needs and explore the feasibility of an itinerant workshop. This Ad-Hoc Committee will evaluate and standardize workshop curricula across the system where appropriate and the Job Seeker team will utilize Personal Employment Guide data to identify new workshop needs.

The final objective supporting this goal is to continue to enhance youth services. The Youth Services team will continue to incorporate youth-friendly materials into the system, including information and links on careerlinkpittsburgh.com. The Marketing and Employer teams will also continue to promote the youth population and entry-level workers available for positions to employers.

The Youth Services team expects to complete and disseminate the “Youth Tool Kit” and continue to align Youth Services with state and local youth policy council and to integrate city and county programs into CareerLink system throughout 2006. Additionally, the Youth Services team will make recommendations to make the comprehensive centers more youth-friendly and make it easier for youth to find relevant information. Meanwhile, the Staff Development team will provide training on youth issues and the System Coordination team will determine the market penetration rate of youth job seekers.

Overall, the job seeker using the CareerLink services will find a more valuable and effective experience through the continued enhancement of our service model processes. We continue to move beyond the self-serve model CareerLink has historically employed and are now learning more about the job seeker up front to better guide their job search.

Goal #3: Create a CareerLink staff development and training program that ensures customer-focused service

This goal stems from the expressed need of the strategic planning team to focus on the training and development of the CareerLink staff, particularly as core business processes that support integration and universal access are increasingly refined. These effort flow naturally from the previous goal, since the development and implementation of the Personal Employment Guide system is central to the continued enhancement of the job seeker service model.

The first strategic objective within this goal is to train employees how to implement the Personal Employment Guide (PEG) system. The Personal Employment Guide Implementation team will begin to execute this objective by conducting a needs assessment in conjunction with the ongoing product development of the Personal Employment Guide system. Once the beta-testing phase of the Personal Employment Guide database system is completed and the infrastructure to perform an effective implementation is in place, the whole staff will be acclimated to the system so they will be adequately equipped to make appropriate referrals. In addition, these answers will be the basis for measuring the effectiveness of the training implementation as the process is replicated and refined over time.

The second objective is to develop a comprehensive training plan/system to encompass critical aspects of the CareerLink system. The Staff Development team has already conducted a needs assessment that will be the basis for the implementation of a comprehensive training program. Additional needs assessment information will be collected annually to adjust the annual training calendar as needs change. Each comprehensive center will develop a training calendar that includes a minimum of one training session per month.

The key components of this training plan include:

- Customer service training
- Labor market information - from two possible perspectives, employer/business development and job seeker (career exploration/assessment)
- Technology / IT
- Presentation skills and professional communication
- Teamwork
- Time management
- Working with customers with mental health issues
- Creative problem solving
- Leadership training for supervisors

Part of the upfront work that will go into designing a comprehensive training system will be to determine the core competencies that staff members need to effectively use the CareerLink operating system. In addition, effective measures of success, which already exist at the state level, will be tracked to monitor this objective.

The Equal Opportunity team, with assistance from the state Equal Opportunity office, is already developing Equal Opportunity training for staff, supervisors and leadership. DynamicWorks is in the process of developing online training as a part of new employee training in core service job seeker and employer services.

In support of this objective, the Staff Development team will review the initial core values, customer service principles and operational standards established when the Pittsburgh/Allegheny CareerLink system began in 1999. They will also define and conduct training on the “non-negotiable” elements of customer service, particularly the importance of “professional” services delivery to ensure system-wide customer service standards. Ultimately, we will redefine customer service expectations and standards for the Job Seeker and Employer teams to better understand and appropriately respond to customer needs.

The Staff Development team expects to increase staff technical competence to use resources, starting with the administration of a survey to establish the current degree of staff competence and define the level of need. Once that need is fully understood, a quarterly training course will be designed and scheduled to train staff on system resources, including the assessment process (O*NET, Qwiz, TABE, etc.), labor market information, Americans with Disabilities Act-assisted technology and equipment and Equal Opportunity training.

The third and final objective of this goal is for the Staff Development team to determine the internal capacity of current staff structure to develop and deliver training. The site administrators will assess the impact on productivity and identify primary and secondary trainers by assigning training duties to selected staff.

Goal #4: Ensure stability and support program enhancements by expanding and diversifying the funding base

This goal seeks to ensure continued support for the many program enhancements that we have implemented over the past three years as well as to ensure continued stability of the system as a whole. This is particularly important in relation to the Career Resource Center, marketing, technology, staff development, the Americans with Disabilities Act/accessibility and shared staff. We work in an uncertain environment, having to adjust with changing policies and regulations. We always have to be forward thinking and innovative in response and make consistent strides forward through our commitment to the system, ensuring that funding streams continue through expansion and diversification.

The first objective under this goal is to engage additional partners to support system costs and work with them to share resources in the region. This will involve contacting the mandated list of partner agencies and identifying the key decision makers; introducing financial support for system costs and the mix of clients they serve; identifying the needs of the people in the organizations they serve; and setting cost-allocation methods for equal access. We plan to engage more mandatory partners in supporting the system costs of the resource sharing agreement.

Another priority objective is to identify service gaps and pursue potential paying partners to address those specific needs. For this, the Leadership Council will meet with potential and mandated partners to identify those gaps. The Job Seeker and Employer Service teams will work to identify service gaps for existing CareerLink customer streams, such as professionals, post-secondary graduates, the prison population and targeted employer clusters.

An important component of this goal is to expand and diversify the funding base. Both the Personal Employment Guide and the Employer Contact Management systems provide opportunities to become revenue generating products/services of the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink system by selling those methods and databases to other areas. To determine the feasibility and potential revenue/return on these opportunities, the Site Administrators, through meeting with H2 Design Group, a recognized leader in providing integrated marketing and technology solutions, will define hard costs of the Employer Database/Contact Management System and determine what the mark-up will be to arrive at a final selling price. The System Administrator is responsible for initiating the trademark process for the both systems and for developing a list of potential customers, tentatively identified as PA Partners, GII (Goodwill Industries International), DynamicWorks and Geographic Solutions. Marketing materials and sales presentations will be developed to position and sell the two products.

Another objective is to identify fee-for-service opportunities beyond the Personal Employment Guide and the Employer Database opportunities. The System Coordination team is to identify lists of products and possible revenue-generating sources. Potential products include assessments, banner ads and a customized web-based referral service. Based on their findings, the Marketing team will develop a marketing strategy and identify markets while the Leadership Council conducts a feasibility study/environmental scan to better define targeted markets. One of the local universities could be contracted to conduct this study.

The Site Administrators will develop a “fee-for-service” business plan, strategies and a fee structure for each non-core service. The System Administrator and Marketing team will develop a marketing plan with recommended executions for each product/service in order to sell them effectively. Finally, the Site Administrators and leadership will assign people to be responsible for sales.

Another specific objective supporting this goal is to identify and implement special projects, such as grants and responding to RFPs. To accomplish this, the System Administrator, with input from the System Coordination team, will formalize a system to monitor available grant/project opportunities, present them to the leadership and respond accordingly. Concurrently, they will also identify possible local and/or national private or foundation funding sources. The System Administrator will work collaboratively with the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board to pursue appropriate funding opportunities for innovative programs.

Goal #5: Continue the development of the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink system and ensure continuity of mission

As the CareerLink system evolves, one of the biggest concerns among the planning group surrounds the continued growth and development of this system. This goal explicitly addresses that concern so that plans are put in place that ensure the mission is not significantly modified over time, as leadership changes throughout the system.

The first objective identified to support this goal is to identify leadership succession. This will be the sole responsibility of the Leadership group. Successors will be identified and encouraged to attend leadership meetings. A new chairperson will be selected and the group will review and adopt the articles of association, as well as review and adopt new bylaws that address succession planning.

The next objective is to evaluate the role of community centers and access points. Since its inception, the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink system has been a best practice model in utilizing community sites in support of expanded access to the system. As the other components of the service delivery model are reviewed and improved, the Leadership will also assess and potentially re-define the role of community centers and access points within the system, based on the current needs and available resources within the system. This assessment process will:

- Understand the partners in the community centers in order to identify opportunities and weaknesses
- Ascertain what (minimum) requirements the Careerlink Quality Review process and site plans will impose on community centers
- Develop an outreach strategy to provide training/resources to agencies, libraries etc. to build regional capacity to enhance the CareerLink system

Leadership will also work with the WIB to develop local chartering criteria, including training for the community centers.

Another key objective is to continue to develop IT/CareerLink systems and linkages. The System Administrator, System Administrator's Assistant and Marketing teams will monitor the CareerLinkPittsburgh website to identify future enhancements and necessary updates. Additionally, the Employer Services team will revamp/update services to employers and the Youth Services team will add a Youth Services component.

Another objective specifically identified by the planning group is to increase relationships/linkages with Economic Development organizations by:

- Establishing quarterly meetings with the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development to identify potential collaborative opportunities
- Maintaining contact with City Urban Redevelopment Authority to identify service partnership opportunities
- Establish contact with the Governor’s Action Team to identify service linkages

The final objective related to this goal is to increase the connection to local/regional/state Workforce Investment Boards. To do this, the System Administrator will review the TRWIB strategic plan in view of how it relates to the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink system; the Leadership will evaluate the role of leadership’s relationship to the WIB and Regional Workforce Collaborative; and, lastly, the Leadership and Employer team will identify, validate, and update the TRWIB industry clusters and high-priority occupations.

Conclusion

Since the inception of the CareerLink system in 1999, we have worked to create a universally accessible system that provides excellent service to our job seekers and employers. Together we will continue to build on past successes to ensure we maintain consistent growth through the enhancement our service models, ongoing training and development of our staff, expanding and diversifying our funding sources and actively planning for the future.

We will continue to use internal assessments, customer feedback and environmental scans to track our progress against this plan, while using specific measures developed for each goal to quantify that progress.

The entire Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink network will be actively involved in implementing this strategic plan, ensuring this plan guides us through sustained growth of the system over the next few years. All teams have demonstrated ongoing dedication to improving the system and have developed detailed action plans to accomplish all of the objectives outlined in this plan. Successful implementation will continue to rely on the commitment of the Leadership Council, the dedication of CareerLink staff and Community Center employees and the support of the Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board.