

2019 National Association of Counties Achievement Awards Fairfield County, Ohio



Connecting Economic and Workforce Development

1. Abstract of the Program

Fairfield County took a leadership role to collaborate with many organizations helping employers fill job openings. Historically, while there had been groups assisting in workforce development, the goals were not always aligned. Fairfield County's Economic Development Department became the *Economic and Workforce Development* Department to organize stakeholders (educators, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and local governments) with the aim to connect economic and workforce development. This change spurred a cohesive approach to create an attractive labor pool for companies looking to expand or relocate in the county.

Groups previously stated it was difficult to engage with local businesses, even as the businesses were struggling to fill job openings. But the concerted effort was welcomed by employers. Partners became more engaged; manufacturers opened their doors for tours; and more than 40 businesses helped create a Career Readiness Endorsement for nine local school districts. The county created training grants which ultimately led to new jobs - more than 40 jobs for expansion of local businesses and 300 jobs from a manufacturer locating to the county. The 342 jobs incentivized by the training grants translate to about \$1,024,000 in additional local tax revenue. Connections of Economic and Workforce Development are increasingly important to the county.

2. The Problem and Need for the Program

There was a gap in services of workforce development in the community. There were many organizations doing good things, but there was no clear leader and no clear ownership. Discussions with local businesses showed that filling jobs was their number one priority. Yet businesses didn't know who to work with regarding developing the local workforce. Nobody was bringing these groups together to collaborate and make an impact for the economy.

Businesses within the county were having difficulty filling more than 1,000 jobs, with open positions for entry level and skilled workers. More than half of the jobs in the county were filled by workers from outside of the county. The county had to think beyond its borders to help fill

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jobs. Also, many local businesses, especially in the manufacturing sector, were concerned about the number of Baby Boomers in their workforce nearing retirement.

In addition, Fairfield County's proximity to the growing state capital, Columbus, resulted in more than 50 percent of its workforce heading to Franklin County for jobs. With Fairfield County having its lowest unemployment rate in 18 years, it had become increasingly difficult to find a population looking for work. There was an aging population of workers, especially in manufacturing, and there were open positions in manufacturing which offered good career opportunities. Yet many in the community followed the national mindset that manufacturing jobs were dangerous and unstable.

The retail segment employed the largest number of workers in Fairfield County. That sector was experiencing problems. Industry players, such as Sears and Elder Beerman, had closed, and it was projected that other chain retailers would follow suit and close brick and mortar locations. As stores closed, workers would need training to develop skills for more in-demand jobs.

Partners in workforce development were facing multiple challenges. The Workforce Opportunity Innovation Act Workforce Development Board for the area, a five-county region, struggled to engage its members and at times couldn't even garner a quorum for its meetings. Local schools had gained minimal traction in developing students into a future local workforce. Schools would maintain that businesses did not spend enough time with the schools, and businesses remarked that schools were not responsive to their needs. There was a potential labor market within these schools. Today, one-third of all high school graduates in Fairfield County don't attend college right after high school. That means there are 700 potential high school graduates who can enter the workforce every year. The county turned to a concerted effort to combine Economic and Workforce Development to solve problems and meet the needs presented by the gap in services.

3. Description of the Program

Fairfield County's Economic Development Department, under the direction of the County Commissioners, developed a strategy to assume the leadership role of Workforce Development in the county. The department added Workforce Development to its name and leveraged its role in the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance, a public-private partnership, to meet with various stakeholders in the community to assess current efforts in workforce development and identify gaps in service. The various discussions led to the following conclusions:

- Businesses with manufacturing and skilled trade positions had both the largest skills gap in its workforce and the hardest time attracting new workers.
- Healthcare and sales/service companies provided good career paths for workers and had higher paying jobs. Although their hiring needs weren't as great, they were starting to see their labor pool decline.
- When it came to entry-level employees, companies wanted someone who had a good work ethic, could pass a drug screen, and had a history of good attendance. They

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could train the workers for any job-specific skills needed. They just needed to find people willing to work.

- Wages were increasing because of the dwindling labor pool. This resulted in more local opportunities to earn a living wage without having to leave the county.
- Businesses relied on temporary employment agencies to fill positions because there was nowhere else to turn for help.
- The area “one-stops” (OhioMeansJobs Centers) did not engage enough with local employers or help provide enough solutions. “One-stops” are centers to assist job seekers, employers, and youth with job search assistance, employee recruitment, job training, and other community services.
- Fairfield County businesses saw an increase in the number of hires that came from outside of the county. This was due to the higher unemployment rates in the neighboring Appalachian counties as well as a lack of manufacturing, skilled trade, and healthcare companies in that area.
- Schools were interested in career development as they were beginning to understand that a focus on just preparing students for college wasn’t working. Most students (62%) weren’t attaining a college degree.
- Career Tech programs were all two-year programs, and students had to decide to enroll for these programs during their sophomore year of high school. There was a lack of skilled trade programs in Career Tech. So, not only were there not many options for career training that would connect students to high paying jobs with local employers, there was no practical pathway for career development for those not seeking a college degree (and again, the majority were not obtaining a college degree).

Based on stakeholder feedback, the Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Development Department focused on the following five objectives (with initial activities, timeframe for development, clientele served, and county role listed for each objective):

1. *Better serve job seekers by revamping the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Workforce Development Board, known as Area 20 WDB.*
 - a. The Fairfield County Commissioners stepped up to make the Economic and Workforce Development Department the Administrative and Fiscal Agents for the Area 20 WDB to help improve services to the area. The Area WDB provides services to a five-county area.
 - b. Sixty percent of the board members were replaced in the first year to increase participation. A lack of attendance and apathy were no longer acceptable. New members were vetted to make sure they would dedicate time needed to help lead the Board.
 - c. New goals were negotiated with the state. Although goals were reasonable, the Area WDB asked for higher goals in some categories to help push local providers toward excellence.
 - d. Providers of services for youth were procured with more focus placed on performance.

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- e. An employer services representative was contracted to cover all five counties. This placed a focus on providing consistent services to businesses with a priority on meeting workforce needs.
- f. The Area WDB created a committee to expand apprenticeship programs in the area.
- g. The Area WDB expanded to add a representative from K-12 education to help prioritize workforce in school environments and learn more about the educational sector needs.
- h. Better defined parameters and performance measurements were included in the contracts for services.

Timeframe for development and implementation: The Economic and Workforce Development Department became the Administrative and Fiscal Agent for the Area 20 WDB in March and June, respectively, of 2016. New contracts for services were procured in April of 2017. The employer services representative was contracted in May of 2018.

Clientele being served: Clients served include adults, dislocated workers, youth, and local businesses.

County's role and other partners: The county holds the key leadership roles of administrative and fiscal agent for the Area WDB. The county accounts for pass-through funding of federal grants and ensures organized management of the board. It partners with the state, other counties, multiple county agencies, and business stakeholders. The county's leadership role and decision to combine economic and workforce development set the stage for performance improvements.

2. *Utilize the Workforce Development Training Grant to assist with business retention, expansion, and attraction.*
 - a. A new local grant program, derived from county general revenue fund dollars, was created to offer incentives to businesses in the county. The purpose of the grant program is to train new workers. Funds can be used to cover payroll training costs, expenses related to trainers, or programming costs. By design, the grant minimizes the amount of paperwork and administrative tracking so companies can focus on their businesses. The application process is simple and efficient, with businesses narrating how the training will help them improve the number of jobs offered or retained in the county; this is something they will already have been documenting as they coordinate their strategies.
 - b. The Fairfield County Economic and Workforce Development Department worked with its partners in other economic development departments in the county to help identify businesses that are considering expansion. The economic development professionals are continually encouraged to discuss possible workforce training grant awards to support expansion or retention plans of businesses.
 - c. The training grant application is included when creating packages to incentivize manufacturers to relocate to Fairfield County. The grant is used to leverage state workforce funds and is a competitive advantage for the county, as compared to other communities looking to attract new businesses.

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Timeframe for development and implementation: The workforce development training grant program was created in 2015. Its parameters, application, and agreements were updated and improved for ongoing documentation of results in October of 2018.

Clientele being served: The clients are businesses looking to expand or locate in the county. The public benefits with an improved economy and more job opportunities.

County's role and other partners: The county is the critical leader. The Board of County Commissioners funds the grant program and approves all awards in an efficient, administrative process. Key partners are businesses. Multiple entities help identify businesses and include the grant materials in aggregate incentive packages.

3. *Improve attitude toward careers in manufacturing for workers, parents, and students.*
 - a. To show junior high students that manufacturing jobs aren't "dirty, dangerous, and a dead end," the county partnered with local businesses and schools to provide tours of manufacturing plants. Each October on Manufacturing Day, junior high students get to see how technology is changing manufacturing. Some of the tours include a visit to Ohio University-Lancaster's Engineering Technology Lab.
 - b. As a complement to Manufacturing Day, an Engineering Technology Summer Camp was created to allow students the opportunity to spend a week using various manufacturing processes to create products.
 - c. A communication strategy was employed to include school professionals in public meeting discussions about connecting economic and workforce development so that the concept of manufacturing was part of the organizational discussion and a part of the educational institution discussion. A summit for county leaders was held in 2018.

Timeframe for development and implementation: Manufacturing Day events started in October 2016 and have continued each year. The Engineering Technology Camp began in July 2017 and will have its third camp in June/July 2019. Discussions about connecting economic and workforce development began in 2015 and have continued today.

Clientele being served: The clients are junior high school students in Fairfield County. The public and educational institutions are also clients in terms of increasing organizational knowledge.

County's role and other partners: The county coordinates and promotes Manufacturing Day and the Engineering Technology Camp. Ohio University-Lancaster and Lancaster City Schools create the curriculum and host the camp. The County Commissioners provide forums for discussion, review, and analysis.

4. *Identify students who are career ready and connect them with local employers offering full-time, full benefit positions.*
 - a. The Career Readiness Endorsement was created to identify students who have a good work ethic, consistent attendance, and desire to start a career. Teachers and

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counselors at local schools work with students to certify the students are career ready.

- b. A Career Readiness Expo was initiated to allow students and parents the chance to meet with local employers to understand career opportunities available in Fairfield County.
- c. Local business and county leaders attend schools to speak in the classroom about careers in their industries. Sectors include manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, public utilities, and sales/service.

Timeframe for development and implementation: Stakeholder meetings began in February of 2017. School programs were developed in the summer of 2018 and launched for the 2018-2019 school year.

Clientele being served: The clients are high school juniors and seniors entering the workforce after graduating high school. Businesses benefit from a better-informed workforce. The economy benefits with more youth ready for careers.

County's role and other partners: County Economic and Workforce Development leaders coordinate the program and meet with schools and students. Local schools work with students to attain the endorsement. Business professionals are engaged. They interview students and participate in presentations.

5. *Increase the number of graduating high school students who have career-readiness skills.*
 - a. Local school and one-stop employees work with students to teach them how to write a resume.
 - b. Students take assessments and courses to learn about business writing, critical thinking, business math, getting started with computers, and how to be successful in the workplace.
 - c. One-stop representatives go to schools to present workshops to teach students how to interview for jobs.
 - d. Local business professionals perform mock interviews with students and provide feedback to help them improve interview skills.
 - e. The Career Readiness Endorsement can be used as a pathway to graduation to help students receive their diploma and enter the workforce.

Timeframe for development and implementation: County professionals and partners envisioned and documented the program elements in the fourth quarter of 2017. Businesses began meeting with students in October of 2018.

Clientele being served: The clients are juniors and seniors entering the workforce after graduation. Businesses benefit from a career ready workforce.

County's role and other partners: The County Economic and Workforce Development staff coordinates the businesses' visits to schools. The one-stop staff work with students on job interview and job searching skills, and local business leaders give interview tips and offer tours of their businesses to allow students to see what it's like in the workforce.

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4. Responding to the Economic Downturn

Connections with economic and workforce development are necessary to respond to economic downturns. The connections keep all stakeholders informed and help to coordinate strategies. Funding streams for the program are diversified by leveraging funds from both public and private entities. Funding comes from local businesses (investing in the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance) and competitive grants from the public and private sector, as well as federal, state, and local governmental funds. Typically, federal workforce funds increase when unemployment is high which will allow for continued investment in this program if the economy suffers. The connections, however, must continue to ensure a competitive county economy.

5. The Cost of the Program

Apart from the workforce training grants, the cost of the program is about \$240,000 annually for direct services. WIOA funds were shifted from the previous administrative and fiscal agents. County general fund dollars supported most of staffing costs. Such staffing costs, while redirected to the combined focus on economic and workforce development, were not new costs.

The Engineering Technology camp was supported through the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance investors, a grant from AEP Ohio, a grant from the Ohio Electric Cooperatives, and in-kind services from Lancaster City Schools, Ohio University-Lancaster, and various manufacturers. Program costs of the Career Readiness Endorsement program were financially supported by partners, such as the Fairfield County Educational Services Center, the Lancaster City Schools, and South-Central Power.

Fairfield County's Workforce Development Training Grant Program is funded through county general fund dollars. About \$540,000 is planned for a five-year period.

6. The Results of the Program

County leaders have met the original objectives. The county has engaged schools, parents, employers, workforce organizations, and local governments in developing a strong workforce and improving the economy. Results include:

- a. The Area 20 WDB is a fully engaged board and regularly exceeds 75 percent attendance. There are no longer concerns of reaching a quorum. The Area 20 WDB has met all its performance measures negotiated with the state for the past two years. Social media pages have been created, and the level of engagement has been high in all five counties. For example, there are 1,409 "likes" on the one-stop Facebook page. The Area 20 WDB was rebranded as the South-Central Ohio Workforce Partnership to offer a fresh perspective to businesses. The Employer Services Representative has met with more than 50 employers and has created job fairs and other employer-specific programing.

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- b. The Fairfield County Workforce Development Training Grant has been used in two expansion projects that have resulted in 42 new jobs and about \$1.5 million in new annual payroll. It has been offered in four different business attraction projects. It was effective in landing one of those projects. A large manufacturer will expand into Fairfield County and will create 300 new jobs and \$14 million in payroll. It is estimated that the 342 jobs that the training grant incentivized will result in an additional \$1,024,000 in local tax revenue.
- c. Manufacturing Day events have introduced careers in manufacturing to more than 200 local students from seven different school districts. There have been seven different manufacturers who have provided tours. The Engineering Technology Summer Camp has had 45 students attend in its first two years. Due to demand, the camp has expanded from one week to two weeks. Thanks to funding from the Fairfield 33 Development Alliance and grant partners, the camp remains free to its attendees.
- d. The Fairfield County School's Business Advisory Council has officially adopted the Career Readiness Endorsement as its first official program. Seven schools from throughout the county are working with students to help them receive the credential. The program was submitted to become an industry-recognized credential through the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). A representative from ODE was impressed with the program and has shared it with others throughout the state. There are more than 40 employers affiliated with the program. Excitement has built to where businesses have asked to hold a "Career Signing Day" to help recognize students who are starting their career right after high school.
- e. Local employers are embracing the opportunity to help students become career ready. Five different employers have met with classes to discuss careers in their industries. Fairfield County's Economic and Workforce Development team has met with students from seven of the nine school districts in the county to discuss local careers and what businesses look for in an employee. Some schools have even adopted the Career Readiness Endorsement as their capstone project so students who are not going to college after high school can focus their time on becoming career ready.

7. Worthiness of A National Association of Counties Achievement Award

Historically, the fields of economic development and workforce development have been separated, each with its own set of goals, programs, and in many cases, outcomes. In Fairfield County, leaders took the opportunity to understand the shift to a knowledge-based economy and the trends in technology-based manufacturing; they then synthesized this understanding into an approach to effectively connect the two fields of economic and workforce development. The connection promoted cooperation and coordination of multiple stakeholders to address a shared problem.

The program is worthy of a National Association of Counties Achievement Award due to its unique approach to solving a workforce problem, measurable results, provision of new services, improved governmental administration, and enhanced citizen participation. The county engaged

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dozens of stakeholders from schools, businesses, and local governments and took the lead in building effective strategies. While many economic development departments do support workforce initiatives, Fairfield County's Economic Development Department is steering the change. Fairfield County asserted economic development *is* workforce development. You can't grow your economy without growing your workforce. Fairfield County used multiple strategies to advance the program, and there are components other counties can model to meet their needs.

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Fairfield County programs are under the direction of the Fairfield County Commission.



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