



SLINGSHOT PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: HARNESSING THE VOICE OF INDUSTRY TO INCREASE JOBSEEKER & WORKER SUCCESS IN THE NORTH BAY

The North Bay jobs economy is strong and diverse, with mainstay industries like healthcare and manufacturing across its six counties, and industries like hospitality & tourism, professional services and agriculture that show strength in unique counties. Nothing is more important to the Workforce Boards and organizations operating in the region than ensuring that individuals have access to the good jobs in these industries so they in turn can make real choices about their lives, families and happiness. But access to good jobs depends on two critical dynamics: first, these industry sectors must remain stable, growing and innovating (including adding new, quality jobs), and second, education and training systems must stay deeply attuned and responsive to the skill needs of their local labor market so that people get good jobs. The North Bay's ability to grow its local economy and prepare people for opportunity depends on how it *simultaneously* responds to these two challenges.

Like many regions across the country, growing the economy and preparing a skilled workforce in the North Bay have largely been independent endeavors. Well-intentioned, even well-designed education, workforce, and economic development programs as a result have been fragmented. To be clear, these organizations do work together, and have for years. But without a strong and common point of accountability, it is simply difficult to collaborate in a consistent and sustainable manner. The persistent missed opportunity is therefore true realization of the coordinated, collective impact needed to fuel a strong economy and connect people to jobs.

THE SLINGSHOT SOLUTION

In early 2016, the region's then five Workforce Development Boards (Solano, Sonoma, Marin, Mendocino, and Napa-Lake) agreed to embark on an exploratory journey to find creative and

collaborative ways to address the disconnect between economic growth strategies and connecting people to good jobs. Their advantage was joint participation in an existing consortium known as the North Bay Employment Consortium (NBEC), a decade old affiliation across the workforce areas that had proved a successful way to collaborate for grant funding and to share best practices. They successfully used the NBEC platform to take advantage of Governor Brown's Slingshot initiative, focused on stronger industry engagement and income mobility at the regional level. This joint funding opened the door for a set of strategies that organized how the region's multiple workforce boards, community college districts (including the North Bay Career Pathway Alliance), county offices of education, county economic development boards and trades councils coordinated together to engage industry. NBEC leadership understood the need to engage industry in critical mass (versus just via one-to-one interactions), and in their true labor market region (versus within a county line). They understood that scarce public workforce resources needed to be prioritized too, by targeting regional industries that provided the most jobs at higher than average wages, with clear opportunities for advancement from the entry-level. They also understood they needed a way to engage industry leaders beyond just the input level, but as partners and over time as co-investors in education and training endeavors. They also understood that none of this could continue to be driven as independent efforts from any of their Boards or organizations.

The result was a broader partnership, tagged the North Bay Business Sector Alliance, and a multi-pronged approach to build shared tables of industry leaders that ultimately could guide coordinated education and training responses, including:

New Labor Market Data Analysis focused on true Clustering of Companies

The Workforce Development Board of Napa-Lake County (now Workforce Alliance of the North Bay) provided staff time and expertise to create two levels of analysis of the North Bay's industry sectors by level of employment, projected growth, average wage, and location quotient. The first level summarized the data by individual county and across the region overall. The second level of analysis showed the top two industries (manufacturing and healthcare) by numbers of jobs and average wages in geographic concentrations. This facilitated logical deductions for geographic footprints for potential industry sector partnerships (ISPs).

Common Training for the Region's Diverse Support Organizations

Organized by the Solano Workforce Development Board, two trainings were delivered to the broad array of support partners in the region. The first focused on promising practices of industry sector partnerships from around the country, and a facilitated exercise that inventoried existing, independent industry-targeted

efforts that could be leveraged going forward. The second training focused on the new labor market data analysis and resulting recommendations for industry targets and geographic footprints for industry sector partnerships. It also included a simulated “launch” meeting, which served as a facilitation training as well as an opportunity to discuss and share best practices related to direct conversations with employers about their needs and commitments.

Co-Staffing by Workforce Boards for Industry Partnership Development

Based on the agreed-upon map of needed industry sector partnerships, the workforce boards of the North Bay embarked on a new co-staffing arrangement for each of the ISPs, depending on which county lines the partnerships crossed. ISPs require administrative support, continuous relationship building across needed support partners in education, workforce development and economic development, in addition to the outreach and follow-through needed to keep industry leaders engaged. The Workforce Boards of the North Bay continue to have critical conversations about what level of co-staffing is needed for success.

Joint Sponsorship of a North Bay Industry Summit

In October 2016, over 150 leaders from education and business attended an Industry Summit, co-sponsored and co-planned by the North Bay Sector Alliance and the North Bay Career Pathway Alliance. The Summit featured California Senator Mike McGuire, speaking on the importance of connections between education and businesses, and also featured a panel of CEOs from strong industry sector partnerships from around the State and country. The Summit ended with a clear call to action to all, to come together in industry sector partnerships so that good jobs stay in the North Bay, and residents are assured a foothold and ladder to those jobs.

Prototyping (not piloting) Shared Industry Sector Partnerships

The final strategy employed by the North Bay partners is actual implementation of industry sector partnerships, including over time three healthcare ISPs (Solano-Napa counties, Mendocino-Lake counties, and Sonoma-Marin counties), and one new Manufacturing ISP in Napa-Solano counties. The Solano-Napa Healthcare Partnership launched on December 15th, 2016, with two dozen CEO-level participants, who brought energy and focus to the complex healthcare landscape of the North Bay. The partnership is focusing on an array of topics, including data sharing, expanding a medical residency program, and education and training needs for critical occupations, including a special focus on skills requirements for serving an aging patient population. Labor market analysis of top occupations and a series of structured focus groups will quickly get critical information about needed skill sets to education and career pathway partners in the region, as well as be immediately useful to healthcare organizations who must make wise choices about internal recruitment, retention and advancement

procedures. It is important to note that the NBBSA members see this first partnership as a critical prototype if ISP development, with opportunities to learn valuable lessons along the way. They do not view this as a pilot, which implies a short-term, one-time experiment. Partners are seeking long-term ways to alter how they link industry with education and training programs, and see ISPs as a proven strategy elsewhere with strong potential in the North Bay.

Lessons Learned

The North Bay is still early in their work. Their Slingshot Compact is signed, and has just been approved. Along the way, the following important lessons stand out:



To overcome years of isolated efforts among the many different education and workforce training entities in a region, the need for common training, common language and shared goals is critical. Simply getting everyone on the same page, including K-12 institutions, community colleges, the Career Pathway Alliance, Workforce Boards and programs, and multiple economic development entities, is a big lift. And it must be ongoing. This means that someone (or organization) must take the initiative to bring them together. In the North Bay this is the Solano Workforce Development Board.



This work is complex from a relationship and management standpoint. Developing truly shared tables of industry leadership requires navigating existing efforts that focus on or engage industry already, and uniquely assessing how to expand and improve them without duplicating or competing with them.



The North Bay partners are learning first hand that addressing the staffing and capacity requirements of cross-county ISP development early and continuously is essential. It requires answering difficult questions about which staff take the lead, which staff support, how much time, and exact roles and responsibilities.



Ultimately, in order to create real access to good jobs for North Bay residents, industry must be engaged at higher and deeper levels. Building the expectation of industry leadership and participation, and then facilitating it, is required, and in most cases it is new when compared to traditional approaches of input or advisory-only engagement.