NATURE OF THE INNOVATION: The Orange County Information Technology Cluster Competitiveness Project utilizes three distinct approaches—self-paced online postsecondary training programs in locally demanded occupations; internship generation and automated matching; and youth outreach combined with teacher training—to prepare Orange County, CA incumbent workers, jobseekers, veterans, and K-12 students for careers in Information Technology.

Key Features

Grounded in Business and Educator Input: To increase placements of new and returning workers into IT positions, as well as upgrade the skills of incumbent workers, the OCWIB, in partnership with the Orange County Business Council, convened regional business and education leaders (representing K-12 and higher education providers) to participate in a series of 16 facilitated discussions. The sessions provided strategic direction to the project's academic, internship, and outreach program tracks, or “pilots.”

IT Programs Addressing Employer Needs: The OCWIB conducted a scan of all IT-related classes and programs from each education provider in the region to examine the gaps between skills being taught in area training programs and skills demanded by employers. The scan revealed that, in many IT-related classes, business skills were not adequately addressed; curricula and programs offered were not in-line with IT industry trends; and several programs were outdated or irrelevant.

To address these gaps, the OCWIB conducted a public procurement to create new and refine exiting IT programs affirmed by business and education stakeholders to be in high regional demand: Mobile Applications and Development; Business Process and Analytics, Understanding Cloud Computing; and Business Administration and Leadership Development for IT Professionals. Brandman University was selected to develop the programs and make them widely available online. Where possible, course outcomes are closely mapped to industry-recognized credentials; certifications from organizations such as CompTIA frequently allow participants to bypass courses or are awarded at courses’ end.

PROJECT FOCUS

Sector Strategy and Career Pathway

GRANTEE

Orange County Workforce Investment Board (OCWIB)

PROGRESS AS OF JUNE, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Total #</th>
<th>% of Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enroll 100 jobseekers into IT training programs</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll 50 incumbent workers into IT training programs</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>104%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place 60 jobseekers into IT occupations</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>108%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% of incumbent workers retain employment</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>154%</td>
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</table>
Connecting Jobseekers and Student Interns to Employers: A second project pilot leverages career counselors from Orange County American Job Centers to connect jobseekers to IT occupations as they complete IT courses. The OCWIB partnered with a local nonprofit intermediary, Vital Link, to launch an online internship matching system (www.ocinternship.com) that allows students and employers to create a profile; school career counseling offices are likewise able to access the system. Matching analytics compare job and internship profiles, and the system notifies potential interns of companies they’ve matched with and provides a value quantifying the strength of the match. Once students are matched to employers, counselors at Vital Link work to get them "job ready," providing coaching on soft skills, teamwork, and time management.

The OCWIB also partnered with Saddleback College Veterans Center to recruit and counsel veterans from the Orange County region, including those from Camp Pendleton, and develop internship opportunities for IT occupations specific to the skill profile of recently separating veterans.¹

Changing Youth Perceptions of IT: The OCWIB’s outreach pilot leverages career events to expose students, as well as their teachers and parents, to IT employers. Additionally, teacher kits developed under the grant teach educators how to expose students to IT jobs, build relationships with employers, and get employers to talk to students. All outreach efforts work to associate students’ perceptions of IT with cutting edge technologies and higher order thinking.

Future Outlook

Sustaining Employer Engagement: As of August 2015, the OCWIB is finalizing an employer “toolbox,” a collection of materials and presentations that can be delivered online, in workshops, and at large conferences by workforce professionals nationwide. The materials build on the OCWIB’s success developing pathways to fit the changing IT landscape and provide tangible resources—LMI data, success stories, curriculum content—that WIBs can use to engage employers on upskilling their IT labor pool.

Breaking New Ground in Internships: The internship website, seeded through the WIF grant, will be sustained through a subscription-based membership for employers to cover the ongoing operating costs. The website will also be expanded for other types of internships beyond IT occupations, such as healthcare, green/renewable energy, and manufacturing.

Interested in Learning More?

To learn more, visit http://ocwib.org/iss. Grantee contact: ocwib@occr.ocgov.com