

2008 Innovations Awards Program
APPLICATION

ID # (assigned by CSG): 08- S-4050

State: South Carolina

Program Category: Human Resources/Education (Workforce Development)

Program Name

REWARD South Carolina (REWARD stands for Rural Economic Workforce Alliance for Resource Development)

Administering Agency

The program is administered by the South Carolina Department of Education (Office of Adult & Community Education), the South Carolina Department of Commerce and Northeastern Technical College. It is run by a consortium with over 25 members.

Contact Person (Name and Title)

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Description of Program

The REWARD Program is a free, eight to nine week course of study designed to give graduates the skills required to succeed in today's Global Economy. It is designed to prepare citizens for employment while at the same time offering industry employers a program to ensure new employees will bring a base level of skill sets to the workplace. This program is currently operating in five counties in the state: Chesterfield, Clarendon, Dillon, Marion and Marlboro counties.

How long has this program been operational (month and year)?

January 2004

Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

REWARD serves the needs of individual job seekers, businesses and contributes to economic development. The rural areas of South Carolina's Pee Dee Region suffer from disproportionately high levels of unemployment. Many of the regions unemployed workers face challenges in basic skills or education that make it difficult for them to find entry level employment or successfully complete advanced training needed by employers looking for skilled workers.

The REWARD program was created to help develop the workforce in the above mentioned counties by providing basic skills and training programs, along with other support, to help bring the skills of participants up to the level required by potential employers. REWARD participants receive the additional skills and training necessary to prepare them to move into advanced training programs or directly into entry-level employment. Existing businesses and economic development efforts in the region benefit from the expanded pool of individuals ready for work.

Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Please see the flow chart submitted with this application.

Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The program works by involving numerous partner agencies that have a hand in education, workforce training and providing social support services in the region. It is a truly collaborative approach. Participants benefit from having access to the services and supports that this network of partners brings to the table, in addition to the class curriculum. The program also seeks to involve area businesses and classes can - and have been - tailored to fit the needs of specific industry partners.

The approach taken by REWARD brings in all of the stakeholders in workforce development in the communities where it is implemented as equal partners in the creation, delivery and evaluation of the training programs. That has included involving individual companies and creating programs designed specifically to prepare people to meet their needs.

What were the program's start-up costs?

Start up costs were estimated by program leaders at roughly \$50,000, plus in-kind donations of computer equipment.

The program was initially started in Marlboro County to combat that county's (at the time) 20% unemployment rate. CATT/readySC™, a component of the state's Technical College System provided computers for WorkKeys® assessments and KeyTrain (the premier training system for WorkKeys® Skills) online tutorials. The South Carolina Department of Commerce's Rural Crossroads Institute provided grant funding of \$20,000 dollars through the Office of Adult & Community Education (South Carolina Department of Education) and \$30,000 to Northeastern Technical College for curriculum development, class materials and to pay instructors.

What are the program's annual operational costs?

Program leaders estimate the annual expenditures for all counties now operating a REWARD program (Chesterfield, Clarendon, Dillon, Marion and Marlboro) to be approximately \$150,000 per year.

How is the program funded?

Annual Funding for the five active county REWARD programs comes from a variety of sources, including Workforce Investment Act grants from the Governor's State Workforce Investment Board, corporate sponsorships, private donations and local government funding.

Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations?

No.

What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Computers are used in REWARD classrooms to provide WorkKeys® Assessments and to provide KeyTrain tutorials for individuals working to improve their WorkKeys® scores. Each REWARD class is different to some degree. While all utilize WorkKeys®, a REWARD class conducted in conjunction with a specific employer may also feature training on specific machines, equipment or computers utilized by that employer. Basic computer skills are a part of the curriculum for most REWARD classes as well.

To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state?

Yes. Various organizations were involved in the development of this program, including the initial organizations mentioned, as well as additional state and local entities.

Are you aware of similar programs in other states?

To the best of our knowledge, no other states have adopted a similar program. Other states have contacted the program for additional information.

Has the program been fully implemented?

Yes

Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s].

The REWARD program has proven extremely effective for the participants who have taken advantage of the training offered and for the companies that have partnered with the program.

Example: In 2005, Mohawk Industries, a primary employer in Marlboro County announced a planned expansion of its operations that would add 300 new jobs to the company's existing operation. Mohawk worked directly with the Marlboro (and later Dillon) County REWARD program to place graduates into these jobs. Initially, the Marlboro County REWARD program recruited, trained and referred 417 graduates to the company 30 days ahead of the scheduled start up.

To date, 1,048 individuals have graduated from the Marlboro program with a job placement rate of 80%. The startup program in Dillon County has graduated 74 (with 100% placement rate) and the Chesterfield County program has graduated 70 with a 54% placement rate.

Another benefit has been the "spin off" potential for other programs as a result of the collaborative model used. For example, when the Community Development Corporation (CDC) of Marlboro County was operating a "Youth Camp " program, their involvement with REWARD led to them use the REWARD infrastructure, classrooms and curriculum to run hold classes in high-tech

manufacturing careers for their youth participants that were supported by industry partners. That came as a direct result of the CDC's involvement in the REWARD adult programs.

How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The REWARD Program started in one county in the state and has been implemented in four additional counties to date.

What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Potential challenges to the program being replicated in other states cited by the programs' leaders included locating sources of sustainable, long-term funding and educating businesses and industries on the direct benefits that supporting these programs can have for them in terms of reduced turnover and lower costs for training and recruitment. Long-term sustainability for the program requires commitment to the program and involvement in providing targeted training from the employers in a county where the program is started.

REWARD Project Flow Chart

