

The purpose of the Executive Summary is to provide a concise overview of the Southwest Region site report. This summary is intended to be shared with regional leaders so they may respond to the recommendations with action strategies for process improvements.

Strengths



Highlights of Integration and Collaboration

Analysis: The opening of the new AWC (Arkansas Workforce Center) in Camden takes the collaboration and service integration in this region to a new level. Creative funding for the facility, expanded partnerships, and the capacity to serve more customers are key opportunities. Integration and collaboration examples include:

- ✓ Leadership in the Camden AWC are committed to operating the site as a seamless system with close knit staff who are professional and customer focused.
- ✓ The development of an online service directory was noted as a real value to staff and customers.
- ✓ Examples of successful collaborative events included a recent job fair with Economic Development.



Highlights of Customer Satisfaction

Analysis: Customer service is a strength of this region. Commitment to customer service starts at the top. The Center leaders are all committed to operating the Centers as a seamless system from the customer perspective. The following are specific positive examples of customer satisfaction:

- ✓ Staff have pride in the services they provide with a strong commitment to quality customer service.
- ✓ Managers have a genuine interest in improving customer service.
- ✓ Many staff refer family and friends to the Center. The overwhelming response has been Positive.



Highlights of AWC Brand

Analysis: The focus group in Camden had more community partners in it than any other region. Their overall reaction to the AWC brand was positive and the potential to accelerate the awareness of the AWCs expands with the new facility.

- ✓ The website is an effective tool for outlining, describing and connecting job seekers to resources. It was one of the best websites of the regions visited.
- ✓ The Workforce system is marketed using the AWC brand, and all partners are on board in promoting this brand.
- ✓ Significant strides have been achieved in the last year or two to expand brand recognition.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Challenges

- The Southwest Region covers a large area and with three comprehensive sites, three satellite sites and six touch points or affiliates, it is critical that the region work as a coordinated system. To carry out the vision of an integrated, seamless delivery method of services would be challenging for this large of an area for a single organization. The Southwest Region has three primary partners who shape the service delivery model for their Centers.
- WIA (Workforce Investment Act) performance in the region has been a challenge not only in the struggle to meet standards but also in the fact that very high negotiated WIA common measure goals have created a tight enrollment policy.

Recommended actions:

- The Southwest region would benefit from a proactive leadership retreat that focuses on the strengths of current operations and the evolving management partnership between LWIB (Local Workforce Investment Board), WIA and DWS (Department of Workforce Solutions).
- Regular partner meetings have become inconsistent in some areas and communication between partners, which staff overwhelmingly cited as key to collaboration, would benefit from a more systematic meeting structure. A meaningful agenda, developed with partner input, and minutes available for all soon after the meeting are important components.
- SWAPDD (Southwest Arkansas Planning & Development District) and DWS regional leadership need to review the dynamics of Center leadership in Texarkana and problem solve with site leaders to provide supportive solutions.

SERVICE INTEGRATION AND COLLABORATION

Challenges

- Cross training often focuses on training other DWS staff and some partner staff to assist UI (Unemployment Insurance) during peak customer flow periods like quarter change. Cross training UI staff to connect the UI customer to all “dislocated worker services” is an important challenge for the Workforce system in the next few years.
- One of the greatest challenges is getting consistency at all the sites. This is especially true of the Texarkana site. The process of service integration is more complex with one side Arkansas and one side Texas. But here even the collaboration between DWS and WIA is less defined and the co-management structure more challenging.

Recommended actions:

- Complete the roll out and implementation of the online service directory and dedicate staff time to maintaining and maximizing its use.
- Highlight communications and promising practices between sites and invest in peer to peer site manager support options. Review cross training to provide more consistent levels of training and expand involvement of TEA (Transitional Employment Assistance) and UI staff.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**Challenges**

- Methods of receiving customer feedback are not consistent, nor very effective from a process improvement standpoint. Each agency/program has a different approach and none address important AWC service areas.

Recommended actions:

- Implement a monthly sampling of customers across agencies, services and sites to standardize a customer satisfaction process on the AWC level. Include a reporting process and an improvement process to actively respond to the feedback.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**Challenges**

- The wide range of performance standards for different programs may seem to present a daunting problem. UI focuses on timely benefits and minimal errors, TEA on work participation rates, and Employment Services and WIA on employment and training.

Recommended actions:

- Look for strategies partners can use to reduce duplication, assist each other in meeting targeted outcomes and develop shared AWC performance goals that benefit all partners.

BUSINESS SERVICES/SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS**Challenges**

- Office managers for WIA and DWS double as Business Service Reps. and do the best they can to make services to employers a priority. All staff who provide outreach services to employers market the AWC brand, but they are more program focused in their strategies and are not effectively organized as a team.
- The service philosophy is clearly stated to target employers as customers, and the collaborative spirit is in place at most Centers, however, the implementation of a coordinated plan is lacking.

Recommended actions:

- Pilot an interagency Business Services Team in Camden with a dedicated Team Lead. It could be jointly funded, but the preferred choice would be a WIA lead. WIA has a more active employer outreach focus and in national models most often takes the lead. The final decision is a local choice.

AWC BRAND**Challenges**

- The certification standards set criteria for what qualifies as a Comprehensive AWC, a Satellite Center and an Affiliate. In the Southwest region, and in many of the other seven regions visited for this project, there were inconsistencies in those categories. If the AWC brand is extended to Satellite and Affiliate Centers, and the goal is to have a “franchise” standard, then this may be viewed as an issue.
- The creation of a “seamless system” out of a myriad of programs with different policies, procedures, funding streams, outcomes measures, eligibility guidelines and leadership is complex.
- The consistency of the brand is important, and at the time of this review, that varies from Center to Center. Value added products and services like the Career Readiness Certificate, training, and staff assisted Resource Rooms will grow the positive image of the brand.

Recommended Actions:

- Continue to develop and market the AWC brand particularly with community partners and employers. Build on the DWS statewide AWC marketing campaign to promote Southwest’s AWCs.
- Establish a workgroup of staff from across the region to identify promising practices, reduce inconsistencies and discuss challenges. Put them on a time limited, action oriented agenda and include partners active in multiple centers (such as Manpower).

Arkansas Workforce System Evaluation

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