

## **Promising Practice: Using Business Tools to Improve a Program Alamo Community College District**

As director of the Alamo Community Colleges HPOG project, Ty Smith, like other HPOG leaders, seeks to continually improve the results of his program—to increase the number of participants entering, being trained, and finding employment in the healthcare field. With a variety of partners, subcontractors, interested parties, and participants involved, Ty decided that the best way to approach his improvement effort would be to clarify for everyone exactly how potential participants were recruited into the program, assessed, and moved into occupational training.

Having been trained as an engineer, Ty often employed standard business tools like flow charts, process maps, and spreadsheets. He viewed the challenges of recruitment, assessment, and matching participants with appropriate occupational training as interrelated parts of a whole and not as separate problems. Viewing recruitment as an *intake process with a set of interrelated tasks that influenced one another*, he drafted a flow chart that graphically displayed the process from beginning to end. Team members provided input, and a current snapshot of this process emerged.

The resulting Intake Process Flow Chart shows everyone engaged in the process exactly how the program conducts outreach, whether with individuals or in groups; makes contacts and follows up; prequalifies potential participants as TANF or others; certifies wages; and then interviews participants for commitment and documentation. The decision made at this point in the process enables the potential participant to move forward or ends the process. Participants who are approved must then pass the TABE, drug tests, and background checks before moving on. In addition, the Alamo HPOG team reviews for employability any individuals who do not exactly fit employer guidelines before they enter time limited employment training at the employer's site. Lastly, participants receive immunizations and have panel tests verified before they start the occupational training program.

Ty has determined that the entire process, from intake to completion of time limited employment training takes 31 to 35 days, depending on whether the participant begins individually or in a group. He has also identified the number of days each step should take and the specific materials, decisions, and documentation required at each stage. Applying this method for communicating the intake process has helped to reduce confusion and errors and more quickly react to special case challenges. A successful outcome is more likely because of this efficient and effective communication and standardization tool.

A similar approach was used to expand relationships with employers. While Alamo Community College District used traditional marketing materials to approach employers, Ty also developed a "basic approach" to reach some business people who might be better persuaded to hire graduates of the program after seeing details about the training received by each participant. By knowing more about the details of a program, such as courses offered, hours, and books used, they can better judge how well the participant will fit in as an employee. As an outreach

presentation aid, Ty uses a Course Planning Worksheet, a section of a spreadsheet used by the colleges when performing the detailed costing of courses during the budgeting process.

HPOG grantees can implement the flow chart approach using the following steps:

1. Select a problematic process or activity area that can be addressed as a manageable chunk or grouping.
2. List the step-by-step activities and all related functions performed in this area.
3. Place these steps in a logical order with decision points. Eliminate, combine, or simplify those activities or steps as much as possible. Add timing or required documents if desired.
4. Select a standard type of flow chart and determine symbols commonly known to your team and management. Assemble a first draft of the flow chart, and refine it with team input and use.
5. Use the flow chart to standardize the process or activity and to identify problem areas.
6. Continuously improve your process or activity and update your flow chart accordingly. Identify other areas as needed and work to improve the general effectiveness of your program.

To offer a “basic approach” for concise marketing:

1. In addition to broad scope marketing materials and lengthy course descriptions, include appropriately assembled and simplified one- or two-page detail sheets.
2. Prepare specific, detailed materials about the training tasks and the HPOG program to be used with employers who seek a more detailed perspective.
3. Expect to engage with some employers and individuals in detail about the program and course or training content.