

High Growth Job Training Initiative Evaluation Phase I Interim Report

Summary and Implications*

Background

The President's High Growth Job Training Initiative (HGJTI) is a major national effort to encourage market-driven strategic partnerships between the private business sector and relevant public entities, including the workforce investment system, community colleges, and economic development agencies. Since 2002, over 150 grants have been awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA) to support the development of industry-driven solutions to meet workforce challenges identified by employers. Grantees have used the funds to implement training programs and capacity-building efforts in the following high growth industry sectors: advanced manufacturing, aerospace, automotive, biotechnology, construction, energy, financial services, geospatial technology, health care, hospitality, information technology, retail, and transportation.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the major implementation lessons emerging from 20 grants awarded in the earliest rounds of HGJTI and document the extent to which activities initiated with the grant funds are being sustained after the grant ended. Findings are based on semi-structured telephone discussions conducted in the fall of 2006 with administrators of the 20 HGJTI grants.

Interim Report

Some grantees used the HGJTI funding to expand or improve upon prior projects or develop new curricula, while others started entirely new initiatives. Those that developed new projects devoted considerable effort to establishing new partnerships, developing curriculum materials, hiring instructors or other staff, and instituting management systems to comply with Federal grant reporting requirements. The lessons from both types of grantees provide important insights into how Federal grant programs such as the HGJTI are used to meet the training and capacity development needs and workforce challenges industries face in an effort to remain competitive in the global marketplace. Grant administrators shared their experiences and key lessons learned in implementing their projects and provided suggestions about critical ingredients for sustaining and replicating their initiatives. HGJTI grant administrators underscored four key implementation issues, which are discussed in greater detail in the report:

1. **Establishing and maintaining partnerships.** Establishing the right blend of partnerships is critical to success, particularly the active involvement of employers and industry groups.
2. **Project start-up, development, and design.** Offering job training for high skilled, high demand occupations requires highly trained instructors, up-to-date equipment, knowledge of the latest industry technology, and flexibility to adapt quickly to changing industry needs.
3. **Targeting and reaching trainees.** Recruiting and retaining participants is a major activity of training programs, and it is important to incorporate available supportive services when serving disadvantaged populations and dislocated workers.
4. **Management and meeting Federal grant requirements.** Having a flexible grant mechanism allowed for considerable innovation and supported a range of training and capacity-building efforts. At the same time, some grantees needed additional grants management support/training and requested extensions of time to meet grant requirements.

As with many grants programs, a key challenge for grantees is sustaining efforts after the end of the funding period. With few exceptions, the grantees contacted had devoted considerable attention to sustainability. Of the 20 grants included in the study, eight continued the activities developed under their HGJTI grants in a similar form and scale, while 10 others continued activities, but in a somewhat modified form or scale. Only two had ceased activity begun with grant funds, and both were seeking new resources.

Policy Implications

1. **Precise estimates of grant program results require more rigorous evaluation.** This report represents a first look at the experiences of HGJTI grantees, but more rigorous research, in future components of the evaluation, is needed to analyze the outcomes of training and to determine the impacts of capacity-building efforts.¹

¹ The HGJTI evaluation underway will: 1) analyze the early training outcomes of six HGJTI grant programs; 2) assess the evaluability of the HGJTI to determine the feasibility of conducting experimental evaluations of impacts, costs and benefits, and performance and results; and 3) detail the experiences of 10 HGJTI grantees in a variety of sectors to inform the feasibility of conducting experimental evaluations in the future. For example, training varies considerably in terms of duration and intensity, as well as whether participants receive academic credentialing such as a degree or certificate. Rigorous evaluations could determine the impacts and cost-effectiveness of different modes of training. Thus, the findings from the current study provide a foundation for understanding the potential of the HGJTI to meet the

2. **Active employer and industry involvement is critical to ensure that well-targeted and up-to-date training is provided.** A hallmark of HGJTI is its emphasis on targeting training in high growth industry sectors and ensuring that training is flexible and carefully tailored to meet the needs of both employers and workers. Grant administrators stressed the need for active involvement of local employers and industry associations in establishing requirements for entry into training, developing training curricula and instructional methods, selecting training materials/equipment (such as training simulators), and determining the duration of training. Active and sustained involvement of employers and industry groups should be a key criterion for selection of future grantees.
3. **Early and ongoing technical assistance and training is important for grantees with little prior federal grant management experience.** Several grant administrators indicated that their organization had little or no previous experience in administering or managing federal grants. Ongoing technical assistance is important for such grantees, and ensures that reporting requirements are fulfilled. If, for example, more reporting requirements are added for evaluation purposes, then additional, more specialized guidance will be needed for some grantees to fulfill their obligations.
4. **To remain responsive to business needs, it is important to conduct ongoing reviews of high growth industry sectors.** The HGJTI grants are intended to support training and capacity-building in dynamic, high growth sectors. To adequately design projects to meet workforce demands, industry trends must be continuously monitored and analyzed, using input from employers, industry trade associations, and other outside experts, along with review of occupational projections. This would ensure that initiatives funded continue to be in truly high demand sectors and occupations.
5. **For performance management purposes, a core set of participant data should be established.** To track and examine participant results, grantees should collect and maintain data on a core set of participant identifiers, demographic characteristics, types/intensity of training and other services received, and selected outcomes. The potential uses of such data need to be carefully weighed against collection burden for grantees and participants. Solicitations for Grant Applications can require grantees to collect and report these data after receiving clear guidance and technical assistance.

* This Summary and Implications document was prepared by the Employment and Training Administration and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the study author(s).

skill needs of employers in different sectors and regions in the country and what factors contribute to these outcomes.