COMMONWEALTH CORPORATION

Case study: # Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce

RE: **Engaging with Employers**

Sector: **Trucking**

Good program design begins by asking “What’s not working?” This is exactly what the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce found when it convened a workforce development roundtable with vocational technical schools and community colleges. The need for Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) training kept coming up. While others had tried offering it, they often found too many barriers to implementation. Given the need, the Chamber outreached to businesses utilizing trucks across the Cape and Islands to understand what was missing. What emerged was that people interested in CDL training must travel far away from Cape Cod to receive training that is expensive and lengthy. When the Chamber then met with employers one-on-one to gauge interest if the Chamber offered a CDL training, the response was overwhelmingly “yes”. A key was that they did not approach training with a program in mind, but looked to fill what was missing and then asking, “how do we build it?”

Despite there being no CDL trainer on Cape Cod, the Chamber did connect with a training provider who agreed to bring their training to Cape Cod if the Chamber secured a parking lot space for conducting the driving portion of the training. A key requirement for participation in CDL training is the need for a clean driving record. However, common but not serious offenses such as not paying a toll are not barriers to participation. The Chamber soon realized they could attract people across a range of backgrounds from mechanics to ferry crew to landscapers to construction workers. For example, a box truck driver for an oyster harvester could only fill up their truck a third of the way based on rules regulating a regular driver’s license, but with a CDL they can fill up the truck completely, thus increasing the efficiency of their business. Another example is that while anyone can drive a landscape truck, if they want to pull a trailer behind it, they need a CDL. For businesses transporting goods to Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard Islands by truck, if the ferry employs someone with a CDL then a grocery driver can leave the truck with a ferry crew to take the truck across and deposit the supplies, and then bring it back to the mainland on the ferry. The Chamber found that having a CDL is most comparable to working in the food service industry because both are needed across different sectors.

Another distinguishing feature of the Chamber’s approach is that the Vice President of Community Impact, who also served as the Program Manager, participated in the online training pilot to better understand what is required and how best to support training participants. By taking the training, they learned the CDL language needed to talk with employers, trainers, participants, and the Registry of Motor Vehicles. By learning about the steps and time needed to secure a CDL and the specific needs of local employers, they developed an ease of talking with employers outside of the Chamber. For these employers, it gave them confidence that the Chamber knew about their business. The Chamber recommends having one person dedicated to meeting the needs of employers. This person functions as a translator between the employer and the program, ensuring both are on the same page. This helped raise employer funds to serve a few more participants in the program. Employers became invested in the program and its outcomes. Constant communication with employers builds commitment and support.

The Chamber found that incumbent workers who had an entry-level job or low wages could significantly increase their wages with a CDL. This allowed some participants to move from seasonal to full-time work. Many who had less than a high school diploma or graduated from a foreign school can make $35-45 an hour as a CDL driver. For individuals and families, this is impactful. With a CDL, a single parent can work one job, not three to support their family. The success of the Chamber's CDL program highlights the benefit of working with your industry's business association, the local Chamber, or the industry union. In addition, employers helped inform when to offer CDL training – September to May. For Cape Cod businesses, June through August is too busy to release workers for so much time. The Chamber found that tapping into the wealth of knowledge that already exists in your community pays dividends for employers and participants.

For more information about the Commercial Driver's License program of the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce visit www.capecodchamber.org or email Katy Acheson, Program Manager, katy@capecodchamber.org.