MoHealthWINs Evaluation Progress Report #1: Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

Prepared By:

J. Cosgrove & M. Cosgrove
June 13, 2012
I. Introduction

Cosgrove & Associates (C&A) joined the MoHealthWINs Grant Team on February 20, 2012. This report is the first in a series of evaluation updates from C&A. The report outlines the evaluation framework; presents a number of key lessons learned during the period 2-20-2012 to 5-31-2012; and provides a set of recommendations to help improve the overall MoHealthWINs effort. By partnering with MoHealthWINs, our goal is to help the Consortium successfully implement the innovations promised in the grant and document the impact of such innovations.

II. Evaluation Framework

The goals of the MoHealthWINs evaluation effort are to help the Consortium and individual colleges closely monitor and assess MoHealthWINs strategies and programs; document effective practices; and use data/information to continuously improve education and employment outcomes. To accomplish these goals, we must ensure the systematic and timely collection of data required to meet USDOL reporting and accountability requirements, and Consortium and member colleges’ research and evaluation needs.

By adhering to a rigorous evaluation process, MoHealthWINs will ensure that it is collecting the appropriate data to address key grant and public policy questions. This evaluation process will help take MoHealthWINs from ideas and opinions to an understanding of program/strategy effectiveness that is precise, predictive, valid and reliable. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of program/strategy effectiveness, member colleges are more likely to use data and information for continuous improvement and build program sustainability beyond the life of the grant.

To provide the appropriate evaluation and data services, Cosgrove & Associates and Bragg Consulting (Third Party Evaluator) are partnering with the Consortium and each college to address the following key performance questions.

- Are individual college strategies and statewide strategies being implemented as designed in a timely manner? Participating college will outline key, milestone implementation steps required to move from planned activities to actual implementation and record appropriate progress. This type of implementation assessment is central to any subsequent outcome evaluation strategy.
- Are program participants, who enrolled with low academic skills improving such skills in a timely manner? How does the progress of grant participants compare to the progress of similar students who are not involved in the grant strategies?
- Are grant participants being retained at the appropriate targeted rate? How does the grant participant retention rate compare to similar students who are not involved in the grant strategies?
- Are grant participants completing the desired degree/certificate award in a timely manner? How does the grant participant completion rate compare to similar students who are not involved in the grant strategies?
- Are grant program completers securing employment in occupations targeted by the Consortium? How does the grant participant employment rate compare to similar students who are not involved in the grant strategies?
• Are employers satisfied with overall employment preparation of grant program completers?
• Are individual colleges demonstrating the capacity to use performance tracking and program evaluation data to continuously improve grant designated strategies and programs?

III. Lessons Learned To-Date

Items identified as “lessons learned” are derived from data/information collected through the following five key processes: USDOL Updates and Training Webinars; MoHealthWINs March Summit; Member Colleges Site Visits and Implementation Assessments; Data Advisory Taskforce/Pilot Data Collection; and Completion of USDOL Quarterly Report for the period ending March 31, 2012.

1. USDOL requires a rigorous evaluation process and plans to closely monitor MoHealthWINs to ensure that the Consortium adheres to the deliverables and performance outcomes outlined in the grant. USDOL expects and will hold the Consortium accountable for using its approximately $20 million to develop and sustain innovative and accelerated instructional programs which positively impact employment, wages, and increased educational attainment.

2. Member colleges recognize the need for innovative and accelerated programs and are taking positive steps to develop and implement programs and strategies outlined in the grant proposal.

3. Member colleges have the capacity and information systems to provide the majority of required educational/demographic participant and tracking data at the unit-record level for all CREDIT students/programs. However to ensure that all participant data are available, all participants must be entered into the public side of Missouri’s DWD Toolbox system.

4. Member colleges will require assistance and will likely need to develop supplemental data collection strategies to provide the educational/demographic participant and tracking data at the unit-record level for NON-Credit students/programs.

5. Given the somewhat complicated relationship among instructional pathways, programs and intermediate stackable credentials, member colleges need to clearly outline an instructional map for each of their MoHealthWINs programs which describes how a participant begins and moves through a set of intermediate, stackable credentials to employment and/or final program completion.

6. Program participant and outcome data collection must be collected at the program level and therefore must relate directly to the instructional program maps described in item 5. Without the instructional program maps, a college will not be able to collect and share participant and outcome data.

7. College institutional research/information systems staff need to be an active part of the campus grant team. Colleges would benefit from strengthening the connection between the IR/IS staff and the MoHealthWINs Lead to ensure that both areas recognize the required data elements grant reporting responsibilities.

8. Organizational divisions between credit and NON-credit instruction are barriers to full program implementation and effectiveness. Such barriers seem to present problems
beyond instructional strategies as they also negatively impact student services such as advising, counseling, and financial aid.

9. In some cases existing and historical tension between a college and its WIB is creating barriers to a fully developed college and WIB partnership.

10. Although all member colleges recognize the need to address developmental education through contextualized learning, stackable credentials, and accelerated instructional models, members colleges are wrestling with how to the best address this key public policy issue.

11. Colleges are unclear as to when/where a participant is deemed eligible to participate, particularly with two year competitive entrance programs (e.g., nursing, radiologic technology and hearing instrument specialist) with entrance requirements.

12. The quarterly reporting process does not appear to be appropriately “owned” by the member colleges. Given the somewhat general nature of the initial quarterly reports, this is not unexpected. However, as future quarterly reports focus more on quantitative progress measures colleges need to be engaged in providing appropriate responses to their quarterly reports.

13. As partners in discovery, member colleges and the Grant Team continuously develop new processes and procedures. This discovery process has allowed member colleges and the Grant Team to produce a number of “best practices” associated with MOUs, student/employer questionnaires, and grant policies and procedures.

14. As grant activities and the need for increased grant communication between member colleges and the Grant Team (and among member colleges), the sole use of email to share information has the potential to create problems.

15. The lack of teams (campus and statewide) to fully support the use of data for continuous improvement, pedagogical changes and program sustainability beyond the life of the grant should be addressed.

16. Documentation of employer engagement is a critical grant component yet, at some colleges there remains no formal validation of employer engagement activities outside of the quarterly report.

17. Employer engagement and use of employer feedback for curriculum development and continuous improvement are key components of the MoHealthWINs grant. The lack of a systematic, real-time and seamless process to acquire such feedback is problematic.
IV. Action Recommendations for Continuous Improvement

To assist with grant implementation and performance we have developed a set of recommendations across the following key areas: Increased Communication and Information Sharing; Campus Organization and Engagement; Data Collection, Reporting and Grant Monitoring; External Partnerships and Engagement; and Continuous Process Improvement and Sustainability.

A. Increased Communication and Information Sharing
   1. Develop a “Partners in Discovery, Best Practices” section for the MoHealthWINs website. Campus Leads should be notified of new content via an RSS feed.
   2. To improve dissemination of information from Grant Team and, improve communication among colleges we recommend that the Grant Team acquire a cloud-based drop box. The use of a cloud-base drop box will assist with information organization, ensure the secure exchange of information, and allow for greater sharing of key documents among multiple partners.

B. Campus Organization and Engagement
   1. MOHealthWINs is not just another grant designed to deliver traditional educational programs. Additional leadership and support at the Executive level at each member college will be required to drive program/curriculum innovation, and systemic change.
   2. Campus Leads should reach out to key campus-based personnel/functions and fully develop and engage a grant implementation and monitoring team at each college. Recommended grant team membership includes the following areas: faculty and instructional leadership (Credit and Non-Credit); institutional research/information systems staff; student support services (advising/counseling/financial aid) and developmental education faculty and staff.
   3. Each college should have program maps which clearly outline how a participant begins and moves through a set of intermediate, stackable credentials aimed at skill development/improvement, employment, and/or final program completion.
   4. Each college should develop strategies to remove organizational barriers between Credit and NON-credit instruction.
   5. Each college should be aware of the required participant and outcome tracking data elements.

C. Data Collection, Reporting and Grant Monitoring
   1. Each college should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities associated with data collection (student system and supplemental) and maintaining data records. In addition, the individual responsible for submitting confidential student records to Cosgrove & Associates should be identified.
   2. Each college will participate in the second DATF data collection pilot and evaluate their capacity to provide the Fall 2012 participant data.
3. Upon completion of the second DATF data collection pilot, each college will report any potential data collection issues and training needs to Cosgrove & Associates. To ensure that all required data elements are collected, C&A will provide the following assistance:
   o Identify the required data elements and associated attributes for each element;
   o Customized a spreadsheet for each program of study for each college with required data elements; and
   o Deliver a data dictionary that explicitly defines each data element, data field and its attributes.

4. Additional data elements that are atypical of data regularly collected for Credit and/or Non-Credit participants will be collected using the Missouri DWD Toolbox system. Colleges and WIBs will be responsible for making sure each participant is entered into the public side of Toolbox.

5. Member colleges and Cosgrove & Associates will finalize data sharing MOUs prior to July 15, 2012.

6. Data sharing MOUs between Cosgrove & Associates and public workforce partners (DWD/DED) shall be finalized by July 15, 2012. The Grant Team should continue to reach out to public workforce partners to increase their responsiveness to Grant Team requests.

7. Each college would benefit from building its capacity to more closely monitor the progress measures described in its grant proposal. Each college should clearly define the responsibilities associated with progress measure monitoring and reporting of such measures to the Grant Team. To aid the colleges in this area, C&A is currently developing:
   o College specific report templates which contain only the strategies pertinent to each college's statement of work;
   o Individualized templates for quarterly and annual reporting needs; and
   o A MoHealthWINs “Exit” Questionnaire for all colleges to use when contacting participants who have left a MoHealthWINs program of study.

D. External Partnerships and Engagement

1. The Grant Team should partner with member colleges to develop a systematic, real-time, seamless process which allows employers to easily provide data/feedback related to satisfaction with program curriculum and program completer employment preparation.

2. Several colleges need to direct attention to improved college-WIB partnerships. The lack of formal communication and agreements with WIB partners creates a disconnect in several regions. College seeking to improve such relationships should contact the Grant Team for a list of best practices in this area.

3. Colleges are in the process of drafting their MOU’s with local WIBs. Colleges should submit these to the Grant Team as soon as possible and no later than June 30th.
E. Continuous Process Improvement and Program Sustainability

1. To share best practices, identify barriers, maintain the focus of innovation and promote sustainability, we recommend the formation of statewide, **Continuous Improvement Teams** based on the pathways and other issues that all colleges are facing. Teams will be charged with sharing best practices; identifying barriers; focusing on innovation; promoting sustainability; and improving adaptability of scheduling (getting away from the semester-based model). Suggested areas might include the following.

   a. Healthcare Portal
   b. Therapeutic Pathway
   c. Diagnostic Pathway
   d. Maintenance Pathway
   e. IT Pathway
   f. Developmental Education
   g. Retention Specialist
   h. Stackable Credential
   i. Non-Credit to Credit Bridges
   j. Innovating and Accelerating for the Adult Learner
   k. Grant Financial Assistance

2. Each college should identify a specific set of individuals within its campus team who are charged with using data, information and feedback for continuous improvement and program sustainability beyond the life of the grant.

3. Cosgrove & Associates and Bragg Consulting are prepared to partner with member colleges to train college “Success Teams” in a five-phase continuous improvement process.

   1. Partner and Stakeholder Engagement
   2. Outcome Assessment
   3. Process Assessment
   4. Process Improvement and Program Evaluation
   5. Review, Reflection and Action

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