North Dakota Community College Consortium Builds On Its Success Supporting the State’s Energy Industry

- Utilizing core competencies and career pathways/stackable credentials as a conceptual framework for all curricula
- Developing and expanding wrap-around services for students to increase retention and job placement
- Working with employer advisory councils to develop and expand industry-informed curricula that embed credentials

Introduction

The Training for Regional Energy in North Dakota (TREND) is a consortium of community colleges initially funded as a Round II Trade Adjustment Assistance and Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grantee in 2012 to address the workforce needs of North Dakota’s energy industry in the oil and gas, construction, transportation and utility sectors. TREND received Round IV TAACCCT funding in 2014 to build upon the earlier grant’s successes and to increase enrollments and participant completion rates.

TREND is composed of five community colleges: two state colleges and three tribal colleges. Bismarck State College serves as the lead institution. The other members are Williston State College, Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College (Round II only), Sitting Bull College, and Turtle Mountain Community College. TREND is the state’s first official collaboration of state and tribal higher education institutions.

Workforce Need

According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of construction and extraction occupations is projected to grow 10% from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the 6.5% average for all occupations, increasing from 6.5 million jobs to 7.2 million jobs.\(^1\) Transportation and material moving occupations are projected to grow 4.8% percent from 2014 to 2024, slightly less than the 6.5% average for all occupations.\(^2\) Employment of installation, maintenance and repair occupations is projected to grow 6.4% from 2014 to 2024, about the same as the 6.5% average or all occupations.\(^3\)

Approach

Over the first four-year period of Round II TAACCCT funding (2012-2016), TREND worked to create new and enhanced educational and training programs, student support systems, and partnerships with industry and North Dakota’s workforce systems. For member colleges, TREND funding provided an opportunity to increase capacity including equipment and infrastructure, program offerings in oil and gas, transportation, welding and construction trades, student access to a variety of credentials, and intensive/customized student support systems – from intake to job placement. Additionally, TREND funding played an important role in strengthening

\(^3\) Ibid
partnerships with employers and state agencies resulting in increased programmatic alignment to good jobs and increased opportunities for students to find, secure and retain those jobs.\(^4\)

Continuing this trajectory, the Round IV TAACCCT grant (2014-2018) has three complementary goals: 1) to develop new and enhanced curricula and credentials to help students find jobs in oil and gas, utility, transportation and building and construction trades in North Dakota; 2) to redesign the program development and delivery systems provided by the colleges to support more flexible and technology-enabled learning; and 3) to offer enhanced student support services and career navigation to increase retention and job placement.\(^5\)

To achieve these goals, TREND developed a Core Competencies Model, derived from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration’s Building Blocks Model, which can be customized to each college’s needs.

![Core Competencies Diagram]

It also developed a Career Pathways Model for each college’s TAACCT-funded programs of study which specifies all the industry-recognized certificates embedded in these curricula.

---

\(^4\) Training for Regional Energy in North Dakota (TREND), TAACCCT Round II Evaluation Report, [9%2028%2016%20w%20CC%20License.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y]

\(^5\) Bismarck State College, TREND, [https://bismarckstate.edu/energy/nece/trend/](https://bismarckstate.edu/energy/nece/trend/)
“Each TREND member college has its own industry advisory council,” says Emily Cash, TREND Project Director, Bismarck State College. “The smaller colleges have advisory councils for their entire Career and Technical Education program; the larger ones have advisory councils for each program of study. An overall TREND industry advisory council also meets twice a year. Our industry advisory council members represent local, regional and national employers.”

“We received very positive feedback from employers and college faculty regarding our approach,” says Ms. Cash. “Employers appreciated that they had the opportunity to provide expert advice to inform curricula, identify equipment needs and discuss employment trends. In addition, many of our faculty come from industry and enjoy working with employer partners. The success of our faculty-employer partnerships is based on the personal relationships and increased communications between colleges and employers. Industry partners provide technical assistance and internships. We have also embedded industry-recognized credentials as part of the TREND programs from such entities as the National Center for Construction Education and Research, the American Welding Society, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.”
Next Steps

“All of the TREND college members are working on sustainability plans once grant funding ends in September 2018,” says Ms. Cash. “The foundation has already been laid. The two TAACCCT grants enabled them to purchase equipment that students will actually be working with in the field; to establish ongoing relationships with employer partners; to develop industry-informed curriculum and to provide wrap-around student services. We are committed to keeping a good thing going.”

Related Links
Bismarck State College, TREND
https://bismarckstate.edu/energy/nectrend