

Minnesota FastTRAC Incubator
Interim Report – Supplemental Questions
Due March 16, 2009; email to mary.schmidt@state.mn.us
Questions? Call Mary at 651 259-7571

1. **Workplan.** Explain your progress toward fulfilling your work plan through end of February 2009. Explain any discrepancies between your work plan and activities/progress. Whenever possible, include qualitative information, e.g. number of courses delivered, number of enrollees in a program.
 - Between December 1, 2008 and February 28, 2009, 24 individuals were enrolled in Goodwill/Easter Seals Minnesota (G/ESM) Financial Skills Training courses. Of those, 23 successfully completed meeting outlined graduation standards.
 - All three partners; Minneapolis Adult Basic Education (MPS-ABE), Minneapolis Community & Technical College (MCTC) and G/ESM continue to be committed to the grant and our work plan.
 - A total of 6 face-to-face planning meetings were held with instructors and management from MPS-ABE, MCTC and G/ESM.
 - The Financial Services team attended three state-wide FastTRAC meetings.
 - A pre-financial services “Personal Finance” curriculum has been developed to prepare MPS-ABE adult learners for the G/ESM Financial Service Skills Training.
 - G/ESM financial services curricula was reviewed and compared to the exit elements of ABE curriculum and MCTC financial literacy workshop curriculum. Gaps were identified in vocabulary, concepts and procedures.
 - Guest speakers from G/ESM were incorporated in the Personal Finance curriculum.
 - Began linking initial work of customizing and integrating components of Goals, Planning = Success” (GPSLifePlan) into G/ESM and MPS-ABE to promote student’s understanding and planning for post secondary education.
 - Began how to introduce and integrate MCTC banking curriculum and college faculty into G/ESM financial services skills training. Initial steps included the incorporation of tours at MCTC. It is anticipated that this will increase the likelihood that skills training graduates will move towards a certificate or degree program.

2. Partnership.

- a. Explain any developments in your partnership roles since the start of your grant, e.g. partners, expanded roles.

All partners involved expanded their roles in terms of the amount time required to collaborate in order to effectively plan and develop curriculum, conduct research, coordinate marketing/outreach and implement the work plan. Stackable credential models could be replicated in locations where there are both ABE and Community Technical colleges. With that said, G/ESM began conversations with local St. Cloud

financial services employers to explore the possibility of developing a short term skills training program. A stackable credentials model could be utilized from the very beginning of program development now that a framework has started to present itself.

b. Explain how the MN FastTRAC initiative has strengthened your partnership and the capacity/commitment of various partners to your stackable credential model.

Before the grant, it felt as if we worked in silos, attempting to accomplish similar outcomes. This project makes us more intentional about connecting our outcomes to a specific work goal. It also allows us to have staff dedicated to the outcomes with these learners and expand the relationship beyond management to instructors, intake coordinators, etc. This has promoted the professional development of staff by demonstrating the power of collaboration and the impact it has improving services. In addition, it has motivated us to think about the next steps and on-going funding to continue the initiatives started.

c. Which partner(s), if any, are not at the table that you want to engage (or engage more) to strengthen or expand your stackable credential model?

Mpls. Workforce Center—The WFC is aware of the project and makes referrals to the G/ESM programs and ABE, but it would be nice to do specific marketing to include this project as an option to WFC clients as they seek employment training. We would like to incorporate the National Work Readiness Credential in this process in the future.

It would also be beneficial to develop and engage supportive and professional relationships through mentoring by connecting MCTC graduates or banking professionals with students and graduates of G/ESM financial services skills training and MPS-ABE.

3. Please share one important lesson you and your partners have learned around each of the following topics that are critical for a **stackable credential model** to work in Minnesota.

a. Availability of student support services so that adults persist and complete training/education endeavors:

Although G/ESM provides long term support after job placement, a large number choose to limit their participation with support services once they have secured employment. This makes it difficult to provide the most effective supports needed as well as tracking outcomes towards career advancement and self sufficiency. The majority of support services provided focus on eliminating immediate barriers that keep people from securing and maintaining employment. Education, unfortunately, is put off for another day, week, year, etc. The faster we can address and teach individuals how to resolve these barriers, the more realistic education becomes for them.

MPS-ABE found that the “counseling” (identifying opportunities and explaining the options to learners) is more complex than we anticipated. Learners have great questions and we need to make sure we can answer them. Our learners tend to have many barriers and need support services but a process/timeline to eliminate their reliance on these support services once they are more self-sufficient would be positive.

b. Attracting and keeping employers engaged in your stackable credential model:

G/ESM has maintained a Financial Services Business Advisory Council (BAC) for over 10 years. New members are recruited annually and help to develop and improve curriculum by providing recommendations to enhance and refine it as industry needs and requirements change. The council meets quarterly, with the next meeting scheduled for March 24, 2009. At this meeting, the Financial Services FastTRAC team will present our partnership and progress achieved to date. In addition, the Personal Finance curriculum and GPSLifePlan integration work plan will be reviewed and recommendations taken.

In addition, BAC members participate as guest speakers in the skills training classes and provide tours within their businesses. Once components of the GPSLifePlan are fully implemented, MSP-ABE students will have an opportunity to engage with employers and participate in this process as well.

c. Integrating basic skills, soft skills and occupation skills into training/education content:

G/ESM financial services curriculum is designed to include review and building of basic skills and are fundamental parts of the Technical Skills module. In addition, the eligibility criteria for skills training programs require basic math skills at a specified grade level. Nearly a third of all potential skills training candidates do not have the required basic math and reading skills. Our partnership with MPS-ABE is key in working with individuals who do not pass these eligibility standard. However, even though a referral is made it is often difficult to ensure that the individual has followed through.

Employment Readiness Training is also integrated into G/ESM curriculum and consists of several modules, beginning with Career Planning and followed by: Job Search, Applications and Resumes, Interviewing, Finishing Touches (thank you letters and notes, salary negotiations, etc.), and Job Keeping. A variety of resources are used and/or made available to participants, including a number of Internet tools and resources. A variety of other work-readiness activities are also available. G/ESM offers Career \$mart, a job development class that meets weekly and includes employers as speakers. The class focuses on handling difficult situations at work, work ethics, and rights and responsibilities of employees and employers. While these services are beneficial, it doesn't address the immediate barrier and intensive case management often required for the ones who need it most.

In terms of MPS-ABE, this is a constant challenge. ABE learners come with specific goals and sometimes do not see those skills as part of their goals. Having the bank as a model, we are discussing customer service, employee responsibilities, etc. in a context that is real for learners.

4. Describe one key **policy change** that you consider most critical at the state system level (e.g. agency practice or regulatory change at ABE, MnSCU, Workforce Center/WIA, MFIP, etc) for your model to expand or replicate.

As we move forward to develop and implement components of the GPSLifePlan across the partnership, this plan may constitute the framework through which people progress to higher levels of educational achievement/professional development and which credentials are stacked. Our work could result in recommendations for integration of a similar planning tool across the ABE, non-credit, and post-secondary spectrum. If we were then able to articulate credit between agencies and colleges for approved coursework done through a grant like this would be a fabulous step forward for all partners. Research indicates that learners are more successful in college when they accumulate more credits in the first year. This means avoiding non-credit earning classes (come to college prepared for college-level work) and allowing agencies implementing approved curriculum to have those credits transferred to the college.

5. Attach a **financial report** that indicates budgeted and actual expenses through Feb. 28, 2009, of MN FastTRAC grant resources. Explain any discrepancies, modifications below.

See attached financial report.