

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 workplan through end of February 2009. Explain any discrepancies between your workplan and activities/progress. Whenever possible, include qualitative information, e.g. number of courses delivered, number of enrollees in a program.

NA

2. Partnership.

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

The M-Powered partnership started in early 2005 as a group of small to medium size precision metal employers, community partners, HIRED and HTC working together to develop a demand-driven, employer focused manufacturing training model. The curriculum training began with one course in metalstamping and has grown to include additional levels in the areas of CNC, welding, tube bending, and plastics. The M-Powered model provides students with 96 hours of foundational manufacturing training, 480 hours of on-the-job training and 72 hours of specialized labs. Students earn nationally recognized credentials through the National Institute of Metalforming Skills (NIMS). We began with a \$100, 000 grant through the National Association of Manufacturers and have since leveraged a total of \$1.9M. The M-Powered program has also been made portable, and we have recruited participants from 7 facilities within the MN Department of Corrections, moving incarcerated men and women from pre through post release, into manufacturing careers across the metro and Greater Minnesota.

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

The MN FastTRAC initiative has provided a mode for communicating to a larger audience the needs of the low income disadvantaged worker to obtain short term, stackable credentialed training. The partnership continues and has expanded to include 66 committed employers and 74 community partners. This stackable model of training provides a more realistic entry for adults into careers with high wages. We have added an important partner - Adult Basic Education that provides necessary preparatory options for students to acquire foundational skills prior to enrolling in our program.

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?

We would like to engage high school's, more employers, colleges, adult basis education providers, employer association in and around the metro as well as greater Minnesota.

As we move this model outstate, connections with communities and educational providers will need to be at the table.

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:

Supportive services are non-existent or too restrictive to make adequate impact on the average low income disadvantaged student. When this population does not have the resources to overcome their barriers, many times educational and employment efforts come to an abrupt halt, prohibiting success. They may turn to their peers, who also are often unaware of resources available, but there are very few intermediaries who can act as liaisons between resources and individual students in need. Once the momentum ends for these hard working students, it then becomes a downward cycle to get them back on track again as any previous enthusiasm and hope for sustaining themselves turns to discouragement and hopelessness. As a result, society pays a much larger price to sustain them, than targeted funding would have ever cost for them to sustain themselves.

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

Though some of our employers may have cautiously come to the table, concerned about sharing company policy and procedures with competitors, with properly discussed and agreed upon boundaries, they grew to value the partnership. Collectively our advisory boards have been able to work together to impact the industry. They are all committed to, and found great support and helpful ideas through the partnership. Once we were able to facilitate meaningful relationships with one another, employers developed trust and enthusiasm working together.

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

The integration of basic skills, soft skills, and occupational skills has been critical to success of the M-Powered program. Our employer advisory board has actively supported this initiative and set our agenda according to workplace needs. They openly shared their frustrations working with referrals from temp agencies and/or “off the street” applying for entry level students. Again and again they have said, “We need employees to show up, on time, drug free, and have a positive attitude and willingness to learn.” We needed to find ways to incorporate these basic skills into the screening process and classroom learning. We started by having a panel of our employers come to the class to speak directly and with authority to their work/company expectations. Our approach has been to give student’s multiple opportunities to correct inappropriate behaviors, and

use each situation as a teaching experience. This allows students to not only learn professional expectations in the business world but to better understand how to solve or avoid these issues in the future.

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.

Our M-Powered model has been using an MJSP grant for the past three years. We have been grateful for this assistance in training more students for metal manufacturing careers. One problem we have encountered with the funds is the inability to expand employers when necessary. One of our largest employer partners closed their facility and laid off their workforce. This put a huge hole in our program and we did the best we could in finding employers to replace the numbers to be served through the grant. Then an economic slowdown occurred and many of our employer partners were unable to fulfill their hiring goals. We were unable to add more employers to hire these qualified students due to restrictions with MJSP.

If MJSP is a funding resource for sector initiatives, some different rules and regulations may need to be implemented to allow for changes with businesses and economic conditions. The ability to increase employer engagement with sector initiatives and move qualified students into high wage jobs needs to be the top priority.

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.

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