

Washington Hospitality Association Education Foundation's Incumbent Worker Training

Career Advancement Program Profile

CHALLENGES

- Engaging participants in the mentoring services supports
- Attracting participants to high-level trainings
- Requiring a large amount of paperwork from participants

SUCSESSES

- Additional funding and scholarships both through the WDC funding and from the Foundation.
- Broadened focus of outreach beyond entry-level incumbent workers.
- Enabled unemployed individuals interested in hospitality to participate in trainings.

Washington Hospitality Association's Education Foundation works to provide Washington State's hospitality community with educational, training, and career development opportunities. Its Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) pilot program offers workers in the hospitality industry the opportunity to take free skills improvement courses so that they can advance within their industry.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT GOAL, STRATEGIES, AND STATUS

Goal: The IWT pilot program aims to support the future of skilled employees in the hospitality industry by providing free courses in a wide range of areas, including customer service, hotel management, and restaurant manager trainings.

Strategies: The Washington Hospitality Association implemented the IWT pilot program in a five-county region in Washington State. The organization conducted outreach to employers in the region to allow and encourage their employees to participate in the program.

Once enrolled, participants could access short, modularized courses offered partly or entirely online that aim to improve skills like communication, adaptivity, and reliability for entry-level workers (and even unemployed individuals who were interested in the hospitality industry). Mid-level incumbent workers, like frontline managers, were also offered the opportunity to receive training and industry certifications.

Program supports included student mentors and the ability to get printed workbooks for participants who did not have access to the internet. There were also three locations in the Pacific Mountain region that offered in-person trainings.

Status: The IWT pilot program ended in mid-2018 and was funded by Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council (WDC). Participants were also offered scholarships by the Foundation. The program served a total of 65 participants. There is no plan to continue the training series, but there is hope to use the lessons from the pilot to develop other career advancement training opportunities for hospitality workers.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The program served incumbent hospitality workers in a five-county (Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, and Thurston Counties) area of Washington State. Participants were typically entry-level or mid-level hospitality employees, but they could also be individuals who are interested in entering the hospitality industry.

PARTNERS

Recruiting employer partners was crucial to effectively market the program to workers in the industry. The program also partnered with organizations like visitors bureaus to obtain spaces to host in the in-person courses and assist in outreach for participants.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Challenges: The program faced challenges in encouraging participants to take advantage of all the services the program provided. Though the program offered and communicated the availability of mentoring supports, take-up of those supports was low. Additionally, though there was access to high-level trainings, like certified director trainings, they did not gain traction. Leadership of the IWT pilot program stressed the importance of understanding how to leverage partnerships in efficient ways. Another significant challenge was the amount of paperwork necessary for participants to complete. It was a significant barrier and participation suffered.

Successes: Some of the program's major successes include offering additional funding or scholarships both through the WDC funding and from the Foundation and broadening the focus of outreach beyond entry-level incumbent workers, which allowed unemployed individuals interested in hospitality to participate in trainings.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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ADDITIONAL READING

This profile provides detailed information on the career advancement programs highlighted in the brief, "**Fulfilling the Promise of Career Pathways: Strategies that Support Career Advancement,**" by Lauren Eyster and Semhar Gebrekristos, urban.is/2CAZnsC