

Doing Business Differently on the East Side

The definition of 'entry-level' jobs has changed.

The blue collar jobs of yesterday are gone, and higher skill levels are now required even for first jobs. On the East Side of St. Paul there are a growing number of workers without the skills needed to benefit from even the most basic job training. Those with some work history and limited skills are finding it difficult to find a job for which they are qualified. Skill requirements for "entry level" jobs are often far beyond the skill

level of area job seekers, leaving an increasing pool of East Side residents unable to obtain livable wage jobs. To address this challenge, Employer Solutions, Inc. (ESI) developed the "First Step - Next Step Initiative; a Job Training, Placement and Career Advancement Strategy" in partnership with Regions Hospital, and funded by the McKnight and St. Paul Foundations and Nexus Community Partners.



ESI Cultural Advisory Committee

Late in 2008, ESI and Nexus began having conversations about ways ESI could build upon its previous success and increase their impact through greater community involvement.

With Nexus' support ESI developed a more comprehensive approach to its work through the implementation of its Integrated Community Based Workforce Development Model.

Through the initiative, ESI was able to implement an engagement strategy to directly connect ESI resources with community based organizations and residents. A Cultural Advisory Committee was formed to assist in effectively reaching and connecting with low-income communities, immigrants, refugees, and persons of color. Community meetings were held to invite participation to shape and inform this unique initiative.

This integrated approach linked residents, community leaders, agencies, and employers in new ways to better provide St. Paul's East Side residents the opportunity to obtain, retain and advance their careers, gain economic stability, and move toward wealth creation.

"This approach represents a new way of doing business for ESI. Bringing business, economic and community perspectives together to inform workforce development and training, we believe significantly increases our effectiveness and produces better results for the community," said Janet Ludden.

"We were looking to enhance our impact by rooting our work more deeply in the diverse community fabric of St. Paul, and asking communities to define their own issues and develop solutions that will be effective in their neighborhoods."

-ESI's CEO, Janet Ludden

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ➔ In 2009, 93% of enrolled students graduated from the program and 40% are working.
- ➔ ESI partnered with Project for Pride in Living to deliver the training curriculum and with the Center for Working Families, the Cultural Wellness Center, Goodwill Easter Seals and other organizations to provide referrals and on going support services to participants.
- ➔ More than a dozen community leaders representing the public, private and nonprofit sectors, as well as elected officials, economic development partners, chambers of commerce, employers and cultural and community leaders were engaged.
- ➔ ESI worked with over 29 local organizations through the Prosperity Campaign (a collaboration of St. Paul organizations working together to build a more prosperous East Side) and other relationships.



IMPACT

- ➔ Community members are able to define local employment and training challenges and create and implement solutions that they believe to be most appropriate.
- ➔ Community agencies are able to develop stronger partnerships, leverage resources, and enhance participant outcomes.
- ➔ Employers are able to benefit from a more diverse workforce of skilled employees with strong social supports and networks.