Northwest Intermountain Manufacturer’s Association (NIMA)

The Northwest Intermountain Manufacturer’s Association (NIMA) was formed due to a growing need to improve business practices in North Central Idaho. NIMA is a rural based manufacturing trade association run by and for the small manufacturers. The area of influence has expanded since NIMA’s inception to the Intermountain Northwest.

NIMA provides opportunities for networking and enhancing communication among manufacturers and with other groups important to their businesses. NIMA is an active voice and advocate for manufacturers in the region; promoting manufacturing through leadership in workforce development and fostering training and education.

For more information on NIMA please visit their web page: Northwest Intermountain Association.

Past Needs Assessment

In June of 2007 the Clearwater Economic Development Association (CEDA) was awarded a $75,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). This grant was to fund a project involving a survey of regional manufacturers to identify the manufacturing industry workforce challenges and recommend solution strategies. The overarching goal of the project was to improve small rural manufacturing business sustainability.

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CEDA partnered with NIMA for the application of a grant titled: "Collaborative Association of Manufacturers and Work Force Interests". The grant required a $75,000 match of cash and/or in-kind. The cash match was provided through a State of Idaho Department of Commerce, Idaho GEM grant of $25,000 with the remaining $50,000 provided by in-kind match donated by private employers and school administrators.

A survey questionnaire was done that involved face-to-face interviews with manufacturers. Information sought included details of activities required to guide development of strategies to address identified needs.

100 of the 184 NIMA member businesses participated in the survey. The surveys were compiled, evaluated and disseminated by the project consultant (Mr. David Bonfield).

The survey evaluation indicated the following issues were critical needs for regional manufacturers:

1. Quality workforce
2. Training for current workforce
3. Increased customer base
4. Employee health insurance
5. Product liability insurance
6. Marketing
7. Education of the industry,
8. Access to funding

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Creating a Regional Workforce for Rural Manufacturing: Linking Technical Education systems and Students to Local Business.  
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Background

Strategies developed in response to discovered needs were:

1. Formation of a workforce committee whose members would work with area high schools for a project that would include student tours of “real work places,” and
2. Implementation of 3-D Modeling software Solid Works and Haas software training programs in high schools.
3. Workshops for manufacturers and community groups to educate participants of the needs and opportunities in the regional manufacturing businesses.

Solid Works in the High Schools

The, “Solid Works in the High Schools,” project was initiated to address findings from the survey. It was felt that any meaningful effort to address the workforce shortage issue for manufacturers would require a sustainable effort to introduce and attract regional youth to the industry as a career choice. Through meetings and collaborative activities it was decided to introduce the 3-D modeling software, “Solid Works” into regional high school professional technical education programs to introduce students to potential opportunities in manufacturing. The goal was to create and maintain a relationship between manufacturers, educators and students by exposing students to manufacturing career opportunities and improving the quality and quantity of entry level employees available to manufacturers.

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As a part of this project, software licenses were purchased for participating schools, teachers took part in manufacturer site tours, and technical advice and manufacturing assistance were provided to students and teachers.

10 Washington and 12 Idaho high schools in the region participated in the offered Solid Works Essentials training. In total 22 teachers went through the program with resultant 380 students being introduced to the software program. Two Kamiah high school students competed at the State student organization level (Skills USA) using the Solid Works software. One student was awarded a Gold Medal and the other a Silver Medal for their projects!

Next Step

The National Science Foundation grant is the next step in the process described above. This grant, awarded to Lewis-Clark State College Workforce Training is designed to further the goals of previous efforts. This grant expands teacher professional development activities through professional development workshops, among other activities. The first professional technical teacher workshop was held at the 2012 annual Idaho State Division of Professional Technical Education’s Summer Conference; results of this workshop are discussed in the year one report.

Additionally, to further expand use of Solid Works in high schools and strengthen students’ understanding of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), which has become a national focus, regional high school math and
science teachers were offered a week long course on using Solid Works in their curricula.

Solid modeling hardware resources were provided to professional technical teachers for use in their classroom to engage students in drafting and designing in the previous grant. This current initiative will provide learning and teaching tools to both professional technical teachers and STEM teachers. Mathematics and science teachers were trained to use these resources to reinforce STEM concepts during the week long workshops. These supplemental guides allow students to work in groups to reflect and connect STEM concepts learned in math, science and professional technical classes.

For a complete report and understanding of the Lewis-Clark State College Workforce Training National Science Foundation Grant please continue to read through the various pages linked from the Home Page.