



INDUSTRY NAVIGATION

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Navigation is a concept that has grown considerably in the last ten years across health and human service industries, and has been an emerging concept in the workforce development industry. Navigation is an augmentation of services that fosters big picture thinking, a collaborative service environment, and more intensive support for our region's industries and job seekers; a concept that effectively addresses the needs of a changing system guided by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation (AAWDC) is utilizing the career navigation approach and expanding its utility into sector strategies. This expansion creates a more robust service delivery in the workforce system and allows AAWDC to develop solutions to complex talent issues that combines business and job seeker services as part of the solution.

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WHAT IS NAVIGATION?

The definition of navigation is: "the process or activity of accurately ascertaining one's position and planning and following a route." Navigators, in general, support individuals in navigating specific systems. It is an occupational strategy used throughout industries and throughout the country; however, there are no set standards that guide navigation efforts on a national level.

A survey of job titles throughout the workforce system in the United States would show a number of Navigators employed through healthcare, workforce and educational entities. Navigators might be facilitating connection to cancer resources, helping new students navigate through the education system, or helping veterans make sense of the myriad of services and resources available to them. Ultimately, the role of a navigator is to facilitate solutions to complex problems or systems in order to enhance the success of the individual.

Navigation within Workforce Development

The need for a career navigation system in general has grown as the economy has evolved and careers or barriers have become more complicated. As the economy shifts to be a "knowledge economy" and a "gig economy," preparation for careers has become increasingly difficult. The Center for American Progress described the need for a national approach to career navigation due to continual economic change, increasing demand for skilled workers, and business need to develop an efficient talent pipeline.¹ This mix of elements requires increased support from the workforce system to help guide the labor force in industry-specific needs and trends to stay competitive.

Navigation in workforce development has traditionally focused on targeted populations that need more intensive planning and guidance on their route to sustainable employment. An environmental scan would show navigators employed as Housing and Employment Navigators², Disability Navigators, ReEntry Navigators, and so forth. Each of these navigational roles were created to focus on specific populations and their unique challenges or needs.

¹ Vickie Choitz, "A New National Approach to Career Navigation for Working Learners," March 2010. Center for American Progress.

² <http://www.workforce-central.org/for-people/intensive-services/housing-employment-navigator>. This model has been the focus of a Workforce Innovation Fund study.



Targeted population navigators focus on a population that needs more intensive services and wrap-around support services in order to succeed. Population navigators become experts at maneuvering within a complex difficult system or group of resources, and take a holistic approach to working with the population in order to aid in their long-term success. They become experts on the challenges and resources specific to their targeted population. AAWDC has used population-specific navigation successfully to aid more vulnerable populations.

A Veteran Navigator, for example, would know all of the government benefits available to veterans and how to best access them. They would know the process for utilizing veteran-focused training funds, how to effectively translate military skills into civilian resume and interviewing techniques, and know the barriers specific to veterans. They would have strong connections to the Veteran staff in the American Job Centers and other initiatives focused on veterans. A navigator becomes fully immersed in the needs and culture, as well as opportunities, of their population.

National research has shown that promising career development programs utilizing navigation techniques share characteristics regardless of focus.³ They all:

- **Tailor services to local labor market needs to provide relevant background**
- **Tailor services to job seekers' needs despite their educational attainment level**
- **Form local partnerships with stakeholders**
- **Provide specialized training to staff**
- **Track and monitor progress**
- **Have dedicated staff members who are skilled at working with the targeted population**

This approach to job seeker services has received praise and been the focus of many evaluations nationwide. AAWDC has used this approach in its work with veterans, ex-offenders, and around low-skilled training efforts. AAWDC saw this same need for targeted expertise within sector strategies work. Staff, therefore, took these successes and lessons learned about career navigation for targeted populations and applied the techniques to working with targeted industries throughout its sector strategies work.

Setting the Stage for WIOA and Sector Strategies

Sector strategies changes the scope of workforce development services; WIOA gives significant more opportunity to experiment and follow the lead of the business community. The changes under WIOA provides workforce areas an opportunity to rethink service delivery and transition many sector strategies from boutique programs to system-wide operations. Highlighted changes include a new performance measure focused on business service delivery, the ability to create sector-based job centers, and a focus on employer engagement.

³ Choitz, p.3, p. 21 and p. 23.



Traditionally in the workforce system, providers have focused on each individual business – this created an environment where staff reacted to the hiring landscape. The focus has often been on getting job seekers placed, which encouraged silos among different initiatives with job seeker populations to employ. The value of also focusing on sector strategies is that it becomes a connection point to the strengths within our local economies. Instead of focusing on each individual business alone, the workforce system can make a larger impact on connecting the themes within industries and support businesses as a whole to become more competitive with a strong talent pipeline. This dual focus on both the individual businesses and the industries as a whole strengthens the system and allows workforce systems to more effectively mobilize the talent pipeline.

Understanding the industry themes, maintaining a current knowledge of the industry, and effectively connecting the training and employment initiatives to the businesses and industries that need them the most takes skill and targeted expertise. Sector strategies creates an environment where an in-house expert is needed to help businesses, job seekers, and staff navigate the unique needs and opportunities within targeted industries.

AAWDC developed the concept of Industry Navigators to become experts at maneuvering within a specific industry to better serve businesses and better place job seekers. An added benefit is it allows AAWDC to take a holistic approach to addressing the industry's needs to aid in long-term economic vitality and industry growth. Industry navigation successfully blends the concepts of industry sector strategies and career navigation to effectively serve the unique needs of an industry, while ensuring job seekers have a strong understanding and connection to key regional economic drivers.

EVOLUTION OF INDUSTRY NAVIGATORS

The concept of Industry Navigators at AAWDC evolved as part of an iterative process. AAWDC operated industry training programs through discretionary grants for three years within the trades and cybersecurity industry sectors. During those years, staff and programming within each grant became more focused and responsive to the needs of the industry. Through the grants, AAWDC realized the power of sector strategies and having a staff member focused on the specific industry. At the end of those training grants, AAWDC made a conscious decision to turn these training strategies into sector strategies. The focus was instrumental in the success of sector training; AAWDC was ready to take that to the next level.

Connection to Sector Strategy Activities

Sector strategies and industry sector partnerships were also becoming key strategies in the region. The state of Maryland launched their Employment Advancement Right Now (EARN) sector strategy initiative to highlight and implement the capabilities of sector strategies in the state. AAWDC saw industry navigation as the glue between industry sector partnerships and a larger, system-wide sector strategy. AAWDC rather looks at sector partnership as the driver of systematic approaches within that industry.



The benefits of industry sector partnerships are numerous. They give clarity and focus to initiatives within a particular industry. It provides smaller businesses in an industry a critical forum to connect industry best practices and to leverage resources around talent considerations that they might not otherwise be able to affect. It also gives a forum to align skills requirements of industry with training and education programs in the region. By staying up to date on industry trends, staff working with industry sector partnership can better develop a pipeline of workers and leverage resources for the success of the industry.

The key to a sustainable and successful strategy is staff dedicated to a particular industry, rather than have industry strategies be one part of a staff member's work. If supporting industry sector partnership is only one duty of a staff member, workforce agencies will likely be less nimble and responsive in their industry efforts. Focusing an individual's efforts on a key industry can improve responsiveness to the industry, and create solutions that are lasting and effective.

AAWDC has found that every sector partnership has different projects they want to pursue. They want to see outcomes and a return on their investment. Therefore, a key job of an Industry Navigator is to support the businesses in an industry sector partnership in making their projects reality. Participating in an industry sector partnership is a side interest of most businesses – it is the main business of an Industry Navigator. The Industry Navigator then becomes the conduit between the industry sector partnership and the solutions-focused workforce system.

KEY ELEMENTS OF INDUSTRY NAVIGATION

There are certain themes in navigation that transcend the industry or individual. These themes can be found in all of the sector strategy approaches within AAWDC.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTISE

Navigators serve as the knowledge base for the organization on the industry and its trends, including industry knowledge on training required, job search norms, and culture of the industry. Industry navigators cannot serve as subject matter experts or liaisons without staying relevant to industry trends through learning industry terminology, attending industry events, and maintaining relationships with industry leaders.

COORDINATION

Navigators coordinate various events, trainings, recruitments, and more to support the industry.

FOCUS ON SUPPLY AND DEMAND

What makes the Industry Navigators effective is that they are the conduit between the supply and the demand, rather than focused on only one or the other.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Navigators are creative problem-solvers. They work with partners and industry leaders to uncover solutions and opportunities.

ABILITY TO GO BEYOND BORDERS

Navigators go beyond jurisdictional and programmatic lines in order to address regional industry solutions.

Although Industry Navigators work with businesses, job seekers, and partners to create solutions, they are ultimately guided by the needs of industry. In AAWDC's Industry Navigation model, the industry sector partnership decides the best course of action of industry projects, and the Industry Navigator works to carry out those projects in partnership with the businesses. These workforce projects could include cohort training, labor market data analysis studies, industry-wide recruitment strategies, career pathway articulation, industry awareness campaigns, or enhancement of regional workforce options.



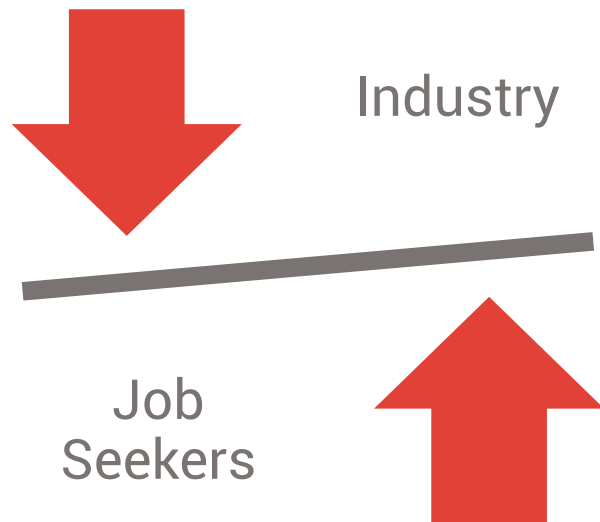
Subject Matter Expertise

Navigators have a firm foundation in labor market data and industry knowledge. They become subject matter experts on their targeted industry and provide current data to keep both job seekers and businesses informed of industry trends and characteristics. This data is the foundation of sector strategy decisions for AAWDC – which industries to pursue, which occupations to focus on, and which businesses to target. Industry Navigators then share this information – both qualitative and quantitative – with program directors and through presentations to staff.

However, data is not infallible. Industry Navigators have led the conversations with industry leaders to vet the data, and more importantly, to stay ahead of the data. By building relationships with industry leaders and industry champions, Industry Navigators are able to determine what the next growing need will be, to determine what the next certification trend will be, and what occupational groups are worth pursuing.

Experience has also shown the most effective industry navigators and sector strategy approaches result in a blended reliance on both data and relationships. Navigators cannot get mired in the data, but must utilize data to facilitate informed decision making in sector strategies work.

AAWDC's Industry Navigators also have an expertise of the industry's influencers. They are aware of what companies are leading trends or technologies in the area and what leaders are carrying the industry conversations. They tend to know where and what events to attend, and which training providers are respected by the industry's business community for which programs. These insider insights are key for workforce entities to be aware of in order to be proactive in the industry community. They articulate this expertise in making recommendations on which trainings are being sought after by industry members, what prerequisites or experience job seekers need, and which training providers have the highest certification successes, for example. They serve on training providers' industry panels, share this expertise with leadership and staff, and help inform new programming around industry sectors.



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Working with Industry

AAWDC rebuilt its business solutions team at the same time as it developed the industry navigator model. Many workforce areas have organized their business services individuals around key industries of their labor market area. While this enhances the focus of business services on key industries, it does not support the entire system's move towards industry sector strategies. Nor does it allow business service representatives to do what they do best – respond to the immediate need of the business and organize responsive services in recruitment.

AAWDC identified a number of differences in traditional business services and industry solutions that supported the need for staff focused on industry sector strategies. Below are key differences in approaches:

BUSINESS SERVICES

- Reactive and Responsive
- Employers as Customers
- Focus on Individual Business Need
- Bring Businesses Across Industries Together for Workforce Conversations
- Immediate Needs
- Focused on Specific Area or Program

INDUSTRY SECTOR STRATEGIES

- Proactive and Strategic
- Employers as Partners
- Find the Commonality
- Bring Industry Businesses Together for Workforce Conversations
- Forecasted Needs
- Cross-Jurisdictional and Regional

Business services staff must be reactive and responsive to the individual businesses' need. Business services staff in Anne Arundel also look at businesses across the business lifecycle and make connections that aid that particular business' growth. Other business solutions, such as Human Resources consulting, is more individual-business specific and takes time and focus of business services staff.

There is also a need in each region to look at business trends across industries – if we become too focused on industry only approaches, we may miss themes or topics that transcend industries. AAWDC conducted a geographically based conference on hiring and retaining veterans, for example, that only business services staff could have led. This was a topic that was important to businesses regardless of industry.

Business services staff are also jurisdictionally based by design. Just as job seeker staff must be able to address any needs of incoming job seekers, so do business services staff need to be able to address any needs of incoming businesses in the area. Business services staff work closely with the local chambers, economic development, and other geographically-focused entities, whereas Industry Navigators tend to work more with industry associations or taskforces that address specific industries.

Industry sector strategies staff, on the other hand, must look not only at the short-term needs but also the long-term needs of the industries. They have the flexibility to spend time pulling businesses together throughout the industry to collectively address a need. Navigators look at businesses as a part of a larger picture, not just as one business with one need. As such, businesses become their partner in the endeavor. Industry Navigators have more flexibility to transcend programmatic and jurisdictional lines.

This model requires significant collaboration between business services staff and industry navigators. Industry Navigators are addressing project-based needs, and long-term holistic solutions with businesses, while the Business Services staff are addressing the specific, immediate needs of each business. Industry Navigators can inform business services of the industry-wide knowledge they gain to support individual businesses – knowledge on

industry trends, networking, and pooling of resources. They can inform business services staff where to target specific energies within an industry.

Business services staff on the other hand, can inform Industry Navigators on specific business needs that may be thematic across industries. They can support an individual businesses' recruitment need or training need that an Industry Navigator is working with. Industry Navigators do not have the bandwidth to focus on these specific, immediate needs of each business. Hence, the system needs both to be effective.

Below is the three-tiered business solutions approach currently utilized in AAWDC. In Anne Arundel County, the state Wagner-Peyser staff provides Tier 1 services, the Business Services staff provide Tier 2 services, and Industry Navigators provide Tier 3 services:

CORE BUSINESS SERVICES - TIER 1

- Consultative Meetings
- Recruitment Support
- Hiring Events
- Online Job Postings and Recruiting Tools
- Access to Candidate Pool
- Workforce Forecasting Analysis

TARGETED SERVICES - TIER 2

- Applicant Pre-screening
- Train-to-Hire Options
- Incumbent Upskilling
- Retention Services
- Downsizing Assistance
- Recruitment Outsourcing
- Candidate Engagement Opportunities
- Innovative Sourcing Strategies

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS - TIER 3

- Industry Sector Partnerships
- Industry-Led Trainings
- Industry Projects - targeted recruitments, industry awareness, etc.

AAWDC has found the industry navigator model to be a stronger business engagement tool than anything else the organization has utilized in the past. The Navigators that work with sector initiatives have a strong group of businesses that they talk to weekly. They follow the lead of the businesses and serve as the connector for businesses to the larger system as a whole.

Working with Job Seekers

The Industry Navigator model, and sector strategies in general, has changed how AAWDC works with job seekers. In order to be responsive to industry needs, job seeker screening, training, and job search preparation has evolved to meet distinct industry needs. Industry navigation allows the system to more effectively learn the nuances of the industry so job seekers can become more marketable within the given industry. In addition, the model has highlighted the need to inform Career Coaches about industry trends; and the need to better support developing pipelines prepare for in-demand industries.

AAWDC recognizes the need for both Career Coaches and Industry Navigators. The following chart shows the key differences in approach to working with job seekers:

CAREER COACHING

- Focus on the Individual's Need
- Individual Training Accounts or Cohort Referral
- Referral to Partners
- Career Exploration
- Predominately WIOA Funding
- Training Based on Individual's Perspective

INDUSTRY NAVIGATION

- Focus on the Industry Need
- Cohort Driven
- Brings Together Numerous Partners
- Coaching on Industry Trends
- Multiple Funding Streams
- Training Based on Industry Perspective, May or May Not Include Current Participants

Career Coaches work with individuals to help them reimagine themselves and identify the right industry and/or occupation for their interests and aptitudes. Navigators do not work with individuals unless they are interested in their targeted industry, as they are focused on implementing solutions to a specific industry need. Industry Navigators may give industry suggestions to individual job seekers, but do not normally get involved in career exploration or overall job guidance.

One significant focus of Industry Navigators pertaining to job seekers is to build industry awareness or build job seeker capabilities within the targeted industry. For example, AAWDC's IT Navigators facilitated knowledge of specific job search trends in the industry, and specific certifications that industry businesses have been looking for. Navigating IT certifications can be

complicated, and the Industry Navigators serve as experts to guide job seekers and their Career Coaches in appropriate certification pathways and where they can effectively gain them.

Another key difference between the two groups pertains to outreach. Whereas career advisors respond to individuals that come into the career center system, navigators actively seek out targeted clientele. To identify potential candidates for cohort training or employment opportunities, navigators employ a variety of outreach methods, including searching across AAWDC initiatives, coordinating with partnering workforce agencies or training providers, searching within the labor exchange system, or employing external sourcing strategies through social media or applicant tracking systems.

Working with Trainers and Partners

With increasing specialization in key industries, it has become harder for companies to find the skills they need. In fast evolving industries, such as IT, education providers cannot always keep up with the training demands of companies. As such, the skill sets required by hiring companies do not meet the skill sets of today's job seekers. The American Society for Training and Development defines a skills gap as "when a company can no longer grow or remain competitive because it cannot fill critical jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities." ⁴ More strategic communication of skills needs is required. Blending sector strategies and industry navigation can support these companies' needs and decrease the skills gap through targeted approaches. Industry navigators can keep up with the changing needs of the industry and ensure communication with job seekers and training providers as to the skills and abilities needed to succeed in key industries. They can bring together the right businesses and trainers to develop new curriculum and areas of study.

AAWDC works closely with the local community college, Anne Arundel Community College, but Industry Navigators also work with a wide range of training providers on sector strategy projects. Each community college has different strengths and connections to different communities that allow for synergies through a collective partnership. In addition, some four-year institutions and private training companies offer different benefits that can yield positive results as well. In the traditional workforce development world, there is a strong sense of loyalty to community training partners, particularly to the local community college system. Yet, in industry sector strategies, Industry Navigators must work with multiple training partners across the region equally and pull together the resources of a myriad of training options.

As Industry Navigators become more and more successful in their fields, an unintended trend has begun to occur. In Information Technology, many businesses are looking for specific cloud technology training, but training providers are still determining the best course of cloud technology training. In cybersecurity, businesses are looking more and more for practical, hands-on experience rather than completion of knowledge-based exams. These evolutions require quick adaptation. One approach that AAWDC has used successfully to date, is to work with companies who can do in-house training to train cohorts of individuals through use of discretionary funding or WIOA waivers. This allows businesses and individuals to test the usability and success of the training. Industry Navigators can then go to training providers to create a more long-term training curriculum, and work with providers to create training courses that meet mainstream funding streams.

Industry Navigators also work with industry associations and community organizations within the industry to effectively support activities. AAWDC is heavily involved with three of the local industry associations in IT alone. Industry associations are excellent partners in industry work.

⁴ Ibid, p. 11

BENEFITS OF INDUSTRY NAVIGATION

Supporting Staff on Sector Strategies

Business services staff and career coaches often do not have the bandwidth to be subject matter experts in everything and every industry. Internally, industry navigators can help to align AAWDC programs and training initiatives with the needs of key regional industries. They serve as staff resources, assisting in understanding effective job search trends for the industry, identifying key occupations and certifications/training, career pathways among industry subsectors, identifying quality training vendors, and guiding business development activities to ensure strong market penetration in key industries. Industry Navigators can provide the system with key information about the region's targeted industry sectors.

The benefit of having Industry Navigators, rather than industry focused business services staff and/or industry focused job seeker staff is having staff members that transcend either side. Industry Navigators see the larger picture of the industry, both from the business and job seeker side. This fosters big picture thinking, rather than looking at one person or one business in one situation. This also allows AAWDC to bring in more partners and support partners more effectively in industry verticals.

Business services staff can then focus on understanding topics that cross-industries, such as business life cycles, sourcing techniques, incumbent worker training mechanisms, and more. Job seeker services staff can then focus on understanding topics that cross individuals, such as coaching techniques, career exploration tools, barrier mitigation, and more. Industry Navigators create a bridge between the two and can focus on industry-specific topics within the key industries for the area.



Focusing on Targeted Industries

These changes have not happened overnight and AAWDC is still learning the results of these changes. What is known is that job seeker customers have a better idea of what to expect within a particular industry, and that businesses feel more connected to each other and the economy as a whole. AAWDC also sees higher training completions, certification rates, and employment rates as a result of sector initiatives, because businesses and job seekers are more closely aligned with each other as a result of sectoral work.

Cross-Programmatic and Cross-Jurisdictional

As AAWDC developed its sector strategy approach, staff members realized that the labor market area and businesses' needs rarely aligned with jurisdictional lines. Businesses did not care where their employees were coming from, and job seekers were often comfortable crossing county lines to secure employment opportunities. Workforce development as a whole is moving more towards regionalism, and regionalism has been noted as a key component to industry sector strategies.

In addition, industries do not often have loyalties to specific training institutions or community partners. Their need is more topical than jurisdictional or political. The difficulty can often be in having workforce agencies, training providers, and community partners work together across jurisdictional lines. Industry Navigators can be the liaison between these various groups. To be successful, Industry Navigators must work with multiple trainers and partners to build a solution that requires multiple pieces and multiple resources.

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

Sector strategies has completely changed how AAWDC offers services. It is not just about building partnerships, but it is changing how the system approaches customers and the work in general. In the two years AAWDC has utilized the Industry Navigation model, it has continually evolved and improved. Two key case studies highlight the capabilities and success of this model.

Case Study: IT/Cybersecurity

The IT/Cybersecurity sector strategies is the most developed of AAWDC's sector strategies, and has been staffed the longest with an Industry Navigator. This approach grew out of a three-year Community-Based Job Training Grant focused on cybersecurity: Pathways to Cybersecurity Careers Consortium (Pathways).

The Pathways grant mobilized businesses around cybersecurity in three counties. Businesses came together as part of an Industry Advisory Group that informed curriculum and job search strategies. In partnership with three area community colleges and workforce agencies, AAWDC led 1,000 job seekers through a series of stackable credentials in order to prepare them for cybersecurity careers.

Many lessons were learned throughout this process – what certifications were valuable and which were not, which participants would be the most successful in the training and the industry, what key skills businesses were looking for, and what stumbling blocks were unforeseen. As the staff became more skilled in their activities, they created a four-element matrix of business needs in the cybersecurity arena in the central Maryland region: 1) Bachelor's Degree, 2) Certifications, 3) Experience, and the ability to be 4) Clearable for Security Clearances.

The lessons learned from this experience and the business mobilization that occurred created a strong foundation for industry sector partnerships in cybersecurity. The Career Navigator of the project became one of the first Industry Navigators, and AAWDC transitioned the Industry Advisory Group into an industry sector partnership.

One key lesson learned along the way was that sector strategies had to be industry-led, rather than industry-informed. Under the Pathways grant, AAWDC was industry-informed. Businesses came together quarterly to give insight on what needed to be done better, what elements in the grant were missing, and how they could support the project. Yet, once the transition was made to the industry sector partnership, businesses became more involved. They dictated what they were looking for, identified key projects they wanted to work on, brought in additional businesses, and evaluated their progress. The partnership Chair led the discussion, with the support of the Industry Navigator and staff. The Industry Navigator essentially reported to the sector partnership and followed their lead. This required a shift in mindset and approach.

Previously, AAWDC focused efforts in cybersecurity on training job seekers in stackable credentials identified by industry, but a key finding of the group was that training was not the main stumbling block. In fact, Maryland is home to 17 National Security Agency certified Center of Academic Excellence (CAE) cybersecurity training providers. Quality training opportunities and certifications to prepare individuals for cybersecurity is prevalent in the region. The issue was more about creating a mindset that could address cybersecurity challenges regardless of the threat or trending certification. It was about addressing the issue of security clearances. Most importantly, it was about building the experience necessary after the training to allow individuals to be successful in their career and building the connections with members of the business community that would guide their career.

The result was creation of an industry-led “work and learn” initiative. Since the inception, AAWDC has been leading the development of flexible work and learn strategies and has been engaged in discussions at the state and federal level about apprenticeship models within cybersecurity. Working with businesses in the cybersecurity sector, staff have been able to work with businesses to provide a Cultivation Model training to business partners to help them develop Junior Cybersecurity Professional into experienced professionals. Staff have also been able to bring together the defense and commercial cybersecurity sectors to articulate a path for junior professionals that utilizes the entry-level capabilities of the commercial sector, and the high-wage opportunities of the defense sector.



Case Study: Customer Service Industries

The success of industry-focused training activities led to a data-driven strategy to identify additional sectors to support with industry navigation. AAWDC expanded sector strategies in late 2013 to include Customer Service industries due to the high volume of opportunities in our region. Key sectors in our region are accommodation and food service, retail, and the arts, entertainment and recreation subsector of gambling industries. AAWDC combined these sectors under hospitality and transitioned a staff member to become the Customer Services Industry Navigator.

The Customer Services Industry Navigator focused first on the hotel subsector due to employer demand. AAWDC brought 14 hotels together in 2014 to discuss the opportunities within the sector and to work on defining a skill standard about what customer service means in our area. These discussions culminated in the creation of a Customer Service training that included job readiness, essential skills, industry awareness, an industry-recognized credential, and a two-week internship at a hotel partner site. AAWDC utilized the Workplace Excellence curriculum and brought in Anne Arundel Community College to deliver the occupational training portion.

The businesses were highly engaged and hosted a session to highlight the opportunities within the industry, share success stories of career progressions, and interviewed potential candidates to ensure industry fit. This pilot training in June 2015 of 9 individuals was highly successful. Of the nine individuals, 8 received a Guest Services Gold industry-recognized credential and all 8 were placed in internship opportunities. All 8 individuals were offered employment and their 90-day retention rate exceeded the industry average.

The Customer Service Industry Navigator also focuses efforts on the major retail sector of BWI Thurgood Marshall International Airport. She worked with Southwest Airlines to recruit a regional talent pipeline, and coordinated recruitment events with three other workforce agencies on the businesses' behalf. Results of the recruitment efforts have led to a 10% hire rate, higher than their 2-3% company average for hire rates. She has also led recruitment events at the BWI Airport for a variety of retail employers located at the airport. In addition, she has worked with Maryland Live! to develop pre-screening and industry awareness sessions in targeted communities to help build knowledge of casino careers and the hiring process.

During these efforts, AAWDC and the business community recognized that improving the talent pipeline was partially about industry awareness and career ladder articulation. It was also about sourcing candidates outside of the traditional Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) system in order to find the volume of candidates needed to fill the businesses' need. The hotel businesses determined that while the hotel customer service training was successful, their return on investment was low and they needed more of a focus on building a continuous stream of candidates, rather than timed trainings with a high level of interaction required. The navigator, as a result, began to work with partners to enhance the recruitment pool. She facilitates monthly industry-wide recruitment events, as requested by the industry partnership, and focuses on various industry targeted populations, such as youth or individuals with disabilities.

A Shift in Mindset

Implementing a strong sector strategies model supported by Industry Navigators requires a shift in mindset. The first step is to recognize that industry sectors, and industry navigation requires following the agenda of the industry, rather than following the funding stream or the programmatic base. It requires being flexible and creating. Following the agenda of the industry could lead the navigator and the agency down a myriad of paths which could be unforeseen at the onset of the transition. The path may not include training, for example.

Leadership must understand that such a shift takes time. Bringing in staff that are the bridge between job seeker staff and business-facing staff will create confusion of roles at first. The key, AAWDC found, is focusing on the industry, and facilitating numerous conversations among staff about the direction and the logistics of the new approach.

Operational Structure

Employing the Industry Navigation model forced AAWDC to look at how staff can cross funding streams and initiatives to serve individuals for the benefit of the industry. Industry Navigators often had to learn the hard way to look at what funding streams could be utilized to train or support potential customers, while evaluating them for industry fit.

Looking at sourcing candidates outside the traditional system requires a shift in operational mindset. As AAWDC transitioned, staff members had to think about new ways to bring individuals in. As a result, AAWDC had to rework the intake and enrollment process, for example, to accommodate large influxes of customers due to industry-led cohort initiatives.

Choosing the Right Person

When it comes to hiring or selecting Industry Navigators, the right person makes all of the difference. Industry Navigators must be able to be flexible, manage the flow of different initiatives and be able to communicate with both job seekers and businesses. They must know what the culture and characteristics of the industry is and then prepare the staff and job seekers to succeed in that environment.

Being able to understand and act within the culture of the industry is key. For example, the accommodation industry is constantly on the go and responding to crises, which can impact meeting times. The atmosphere of the meetings is often jovial and full of excitement. They prefer telephone and in person communication. The Customer Services Industry Navigator is a perfect match for the industry, because she is focused on the customer experience. She brings food and drink to every meeting, and exudes the hospitality and customer service in her interactions with industry representatives. Industry Navigators must take the time to understand the culture of the industry and emulate the key traits of communication preferences and approaches to projects.

A theme among all AAWDC Industry Navigators is the ability to build relationships with a variety of stakeholders. They need to be able to see both sides of business and job seeker and make the connection between the two. Navigators must be strong communicators and be passionate about the industry they are working with. In addition, they should be able to manage a project, as industry-led solutions are often project-based. As a result, AAWDC invested in training the Industry Navigators in Project Management to support their industry efforts.

Another key trait of successful Industry Navigators is the ability to listen more than speak. Navigators must be able to facilitate rather than lead, which can be difficult to do. Otherwise, the solutions will be Navigator-led, rather than industry-led.

Finally, industry experience is highly desirable. AAWDC has employed Industry Navigators with various levels of industry experience. If the individual has experience within the industry, it reduces the learning curve of the individual significantly and allows them to more easily “speak the language” of the industry. However, AAWDC has taken the approach of ensuring the Navigators are subject matter experts by supporting occupational training certifications, sending navigators to industry conferences and seminars, and the navigators themselves have taken the initiative to enhance their knowledge through platforms such as Coursera.

Funding

Navigation efforts have been traditionally funded through discretionary grants. There are pros and cons to this approach. While discretionary grants can provide the funding for the position itself, it can also refocus the navigator's efforts if not done strategically. Grants have their own deliverables and metrics that are not always in line with industry sector priorities. It can also distract them from serving as subject matter experts to the system as a whole. Workforce agencies must be careful to strategically align discretionary funding streams with the goals of the industry sector partnership and collaborate significantly with other programs or partners to create a continuum of services.

AAWDC has also funded Industry Navigation through WIOA funding. Staff members have experimented with industry carve-outs of WIOA training dollars and ensured that all customers were co-enrolled in WIOA. AAWDC is moving more to braiding funding of Industry Navigators to ensure that they are able to effect the system as a whole, rather than individual initiatives or funding streams.

AAWDC INDUSTRY NAVIGATORS

BIOSCIENCE NAVIGATOR subject matter expert in biotechnology, and pharmacological research sectors. Projects include industry mentoring program and biomanufacturing training.

CUSTOMER SERVICE INDUSTRIES NAVIGATOR subject matter expert in retail, accommodation, and gambling sectors. Projects include casino awareness, hotel sector partnership, BWI Airport retail, industry-wide recruitment efforts, and essential workplace skills training.

CYBERSECURITY/IT NAVIGATOR subject matter expert in commercial and defense cybersecurity sectors. Projects include CyberWorks sector partnership, transitioning military training, business-led trainings, and regional cohort training.

CONSTRUCTION/TRADES NAVIGATOR subject matter expert in trades, with a focus on green technologies. Projects include wastewater careers awareness, heavy construction training, and working with regional labor organizations.

