

SLATE Update

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. LOUIS AGENCY ON TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (SLATE)



Francis G. Slay, Mayor



ST. LOUIS AGENCY ON TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

SLATE
americanjobcenter

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SLATE Update is a monthly newsletter produced by the St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment (SLATE), a unit of St. Louis City government helping match area job seekers with businesses through a variety of no-cost services.

The purpose of this publication is to share the progress and outcomes of our many programs, and will be of special interest to legislators, Workforce Investment Board members, vendors, partners, educational institutions, other public agencies or anyone with an interest in workforce development.

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ST. LOUIS BIOSCIENCE JOBS AND INNOVATION ACCELERATOR SURPASSES GOALS

In October 2011, SLATE, together with the St. Louis County Economic Council and the St. Louis Minority Supplier Development Council (MSDC), won the *Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge*, a **\$1.8 million** federal grant. With co-applicants BioSTL, BioGenerator and the Center for Emerging Technologies, the grantees collaborated on programs to increase talent available to

emerging companies in the region's bioscience sector. The funds from the grant helped to ensure the region's bioscience businesses continued to grow and that a strong talent pool was available.

The original workforce development goal under this grant was to place **60** dislocated and adult jobseekers in bioscience sector jobs through On-the-Job Training

Photo: Jennifer Bohnert, BioGenerator, and Joel Reinert, SLATE OJT Coordinator

(OJT) over four years; and SLATE is pleased to report that this goal has already been surpassed. To date, **74** individuals have been placed in full time positions through OJT. The participants' hourly wage averaged over \$20/hour to start; positions ranged from entry-level lab assistants to research scientists.

The implementation of OJT brought with it specific challenges, however. Smaller start-ups typically do not have the resources to hire someone full-time until a new product or service has been developed and a revenue stream established. In response, SLATE proposed, and the U.S. Dept. of Labor approved, the best practice of shared staff. This allowed two small companies, generally located in the same bioscience incubator facility, to agree to time-share one staff person with the more established company serving as the primary employer. After the OJT period was completed, the companies jointly assumed the full cost of the wages until one could formally create a full-time position.

The Bioscience Jobs Accelerator allowed numerous new enterprises to bring on one or more

employees, help them learn new skills, and achieve their business goals faster than they otherwise would have. "The Bioscience grant surpassed our expectations as it fulfilled a real need," stated Bonnie Forker, SLATE's Business Development Manager. "There are a lot of start-up businesses in this sector, developing new and exciting ideas and products."

FASTTRAC GUIDES A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS

For the last 3 months Lynn Larkin of Design Extra LLC, an interior design firm with offices in historic Lafayette Square and Florida, has been learning the best strategies to grow her business. The end result - a business plan to attract the financing needed to expand her venture. While this is not the first business plan Lynn has prepared, she feels it is the most important.

Lynn's journey to small business ownership began in 2008, when she was laid off from a large architectural firm. After some time in the job market, it became evident there were very few opportunities in her field; she decided that she had enough contacts and business leads to establish her own enterprise. Through networking, Lynn landed her first major client - St. Andrew's Services for seniors, which provided a significant boost to her business in the early stages.

At that time, Lynn enrolled in the **FastTrac** for *New Ventures* program with instructor Lynette Watson. FastTrac, which provides a range of entrepreneurial ser-

vices, is now SLATE's partner, co-located within our building at 1520 Market Street and part of the University of Missouri Extension Program. FastTrac gave her invaluable advice on legal steps, copyrights and trademarks, selecting the company's name and logo, taxes, insurance, and leadership skills. The end result was her business plan and the choice to create her own LLC.

Lynn continued to rely on advice from FastTrac to market her company. Before long, she was working on a number of senior living, residential and hospitality projects, including restaurants and hotels, and started to gain corporate clients. In about a year after starting out, Lynn moved into a new business space that has been Design Extra's location ever since.

Her current class, FastTrac for *Growth Venture*, has taught Lynn to shift focus. "I need to work more on cash flow projections, marketing, and business development - also constantly to learn more about managing money and employees." Lynn says that the class encourages participants to meet one-on-one outside the class and learn more about each other. This approach can result in connections that could potentially develop into unique new markets.

She continues to stay abreast design trends, solutions and products, but her main focus is her clients, including attending the relevant conferences. "The better we understand our clients' industry, the better we can assist them. Once we got involved [in senior living] and realized how many lives we are touching, we become more aware

EVENTS *Calendar*

- **Apr. 2, 16, 30:** *EBLAP: Legal Clinics*
- **Apr. 2:** *EBLAP: Handling of Employment Contracts*
- **Apr. 13:** *Hospitality Recruitment Event*
- **Apr. 14:** *Cement Masons Info Session*
- **Apr. 15:** *SCI Engineering, Inc. On-site Interviews*



Lynn Larkin, Owner of Design Extra LLC, in her Lafayette Square office

of what we are really doing to help residents and their families...we realize the impact we are making in people's lives. That's rewarding."

Lynn Larkin's firm reported impressive revenue of \$600,000 in 2014, but she believes this is just the start of bigger and better developments and is committed to continued learning. Lynn became certified as a Woman Business Enterprise (WBE) in 2009; recently, she has been accepted to attend Webster University's Emerging Leader class.

FIRST SOURCE AGREEMENTS KEEP UP WITH CHANGING TIMES

First Source is a St. Louis City Ordinance that became law in the early 90s to help transition citizens from welfare to gainful employment. Originally, the legislation made sure that low-skill workers, including those with significant barriers to employment such as felons and uneducated single mothers, were included in the construction of new developments

that received public funding.

SLATE works to ensure that area employers meet the terms of the First Source Ordinance, while helping to keep the legislation current and relevant, with new emphasis on job skills training.

When a company decides to move into the City and seeks financial incentives under a First Source agreement, it is eligible for no-cost worker referrals from SLATE American Job Center, the St. Louis area's "first source" of unemployed individuals.

SLATE offers businesses quality recruitment services, including help with job fairs, pre-screening and pre-testing. Depending on the size of the recruitment effort, SLATE can provide as many as **20** people to staff a job fair and potential savings of thousands of dollars for companies with limited HR resources. With logistics taken care of by SLATE, the companies can then focus on actually meeting candidates and find the best fit for each position.

For many companies, SLATE also acts as a "first source" for outreach to the public with job openings. "We match [candidates] as best as we can and get the word out to individuals that have that skill set," said Ken Riddick, the Business Developer at SLATE responsible for First Source contracts.

First Source was always envisioned as primarily helping St. Louis City residents. However, today's interconnected, regional economy calls for some flexibility. First Source does not exclude anyone based on their geographic location; those who are hired could have been touched by any American Job Center, including those in St. Louis County. SLATE continues to coordinate with the County's Division of Workforce Development to provide seamless services that help companies in both municipalities.

SLATE has been particularly successful in providing recruitment services under First Source for large developments. Projects that provide a significant boost to the local economy, including *IKEA*, *Ballpark Village*, and *Lumiere Casino* among others, are bringing hundreds of new jobs to the region; many are currently recruiting through SLATE American Job Center.

In addition, SLATE partners with *NorthSide Regeneration*, a major redevelopment project that will ultimately establish state of the art



business districts in formerly abandoned areas of North St. Louis. These are expected to attract a wide range of jobs, including manufacturing, healthcare, and high tech over the next decade. Experience and education will be essential for these types of positions, and First Source will continue to ensure that everyone has access to opportunity.

The demands are even higher for IT workers. To accommodate *Cortex* and other companies falling under First Source, SLATE has assisted with recruitment and partnered with *LaunchCode* to prepare the next generation of IT professionals through the Reboot U program.

“A lot of times, even an educated person that has the experience and the credentials, but just hasn’t kept up with the market place - they still find it difficult to break in. And this is where SLATE comes in,” states Riddick.

Currently, SLATE works with **75** companies under the First Source Ordinance. Ken Riddick wants this number to grow, and hopes to help both new and existing businesses. “We just want to make companies as successful as possible and provide the structure for them to grow. All of them provide vibrancy to the City of St. Louis,” he said.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED VETERANS A PRIORITY



As servicemen and women return from overseas, SLATE has seen an increased number of disabled veterans attending the Professional Series and the Missouri Veterans Work-Ready Employment Assis-

tance Program (WREAP) workshops. For many this is their introduction to SLATE and an American Job Center.

Traditionally, disabled veterans have been served by a Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) center. Under the new Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), employment assistance now has to be provided by local public workforce agencies, such as SLATE.

“It only makes sense to consolidate our efforts,” said Frank Alaniz, Missouri Regional Workforce Liaison at SLATE. “The employment piece should be integrated into an overall service for disabled veterans”.

To establish a rapport between partners involved in serving disabled veterans, Frank began conducting workshops, in partnership with VR and other organizations, across the state. Participants include representatives from the business community and partners that specialize in serving persons with disabilities such as United Cerebral Palsy, VR, Alternative Opportunities (AO), and Missouri Business Leadership Network (MOBLIN). The process strengthened organizational connections and will help both veterans and persons with disabilities more rapidly obtain meaningful employment.

As his workshops gained in popularity, Alaniz began receiving invitations to talk about serving



Frank Alaniz conducts a VR Workshop in St. Louis

populations with disabilities at statewide events, such as APSE-MO (Missouri Chapter of the Association of People Supporting Employment) Conference and the Missouri Rehabilitation Association in conjunction with the Missouri Association for Workforce Development (MAWD), Conference. Both events will take place in April.

Frank believes that SLATE is now better positioned to serve disabled veterans than a year ago. Currently, SLATE has a VR partner visiting our office once a week to meet with candidates that came through our system. SLATE continues to rely on Missouri Veterans Representatives on site, that assist veterans and the businesses that hire them. SLATE is in the process of establishing a Disability Awareness Committee as part of the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to identify further resources that can be brought to our American Job Center.

Frank Alaniz, a former member of the Air National Guard, will continue to coordinate with organizations across Missouri and incorporate their expertise into American Job Centers, making the network of services easier to navigate.