



PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

The Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives provides a wealth of information and insights to help support programs and policies throughout the state. This month's Partner Perspective highlights how the staff at Michigan Works! Southwest helped refine Career Explorer and how they are using and promoting the tool to connect job seekers with new opportunities.

PROVIDING PERSONALIZED CAREER AND EDUCATION INFORMATION TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Background

Michigan Works! Southwest, a partner in the American Job Center network, provides demand-driven services to job seekers and employers in Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties. Michigan Works! Southwest strives to prepare a qualified workforce to meet the talent needs of local businesses and industries in Southwest Michigan, a focus aligned with the goals of the Career Explorer tool. As the selected pilot site of the Data for American Dream (D4AD) project, Michigan Works! Southwest staff were able to provide input to ensure that the Career Explorer tool was both easy to use and assisted job seekers in making data-driven decisions to guide their career and training goals.

Design

Throughout tool development, Michigan Works! Southwest staff were provided the opportunity to supply feedback on the tool's design and functionality from the perspective of those who would be working side-by-side with job seekers accessing the Career Explorer tool. Staff provided input to ensure Career Explorer provided information that low-income, unemployed, and underemployed individuals needed to access better jobs, education, and training opportunities. Additionally, virtual feedback sessions were conducted to obtain input from staff across multiple levels of expertise and background, ensuring Career Explorer was user friendly, and provided information that would be meaningful to job seekers. To test this, Michigan Works! Southwest also engaged local job seekers in a focus group to gather insight from the targeted end user.

As a result of the feedback received, a Career Explorer User Guide was created. This ensured that once the tool launched statewide, Michigan Works! staff throughout the system would be able to consistently communicate the benefits of the tool to job seekers. It also provided an in-depth overview of the tool's functionality to assist individuals in the use of the tool itself.

Statewide training was also conducted to ensure Michigan Works! staff and partners were provided guidance related to the intended use of the tool. Staff learned about the functionality of the tool and the data sources

involved in determining the individualized recommendations.

Outreach

An additional critical partnership with Piper and Gold Public Relations resulted in a media campaign released in July of 2021 that focused on bringing awareness to the Pure Michigan Talent Connect's Career Explorer tool. The data-driven and customer-focused marketing campaign largely focused on increasing the use of Career Explorer and promoting its ability to provide tailored recommendations to individuals. This will result in professional achievements that align with both the labor market and the job seeker's personal ambitions.

Local Implementation

Prior to the release of the tool, Michigan Works! Southwest conducted internal training to frontline staff so they could best assist job seekers when they access the Career Explorer tool and begin determining individualized career strategies based on the tool's recommendations.

Outside of the tool's utilization within workforce development programs, individuals registering for work and those experiencing long-term unemployment are especially inclined to use the tool. It will assist them in identifying opportunities for potential career pathways, while providing personalized job postings and comparative information about local training options. This information will be in real time and in alignment with local labor market projections. The tool itself, while available to individuals remotely, is also accessible on all computers within the Michigan Works! Southwest Service Centers. To provide easy access for those interested in engaging with Career Explorer, computer desktops feature links directly to Pure Michigan Talent Connect which houses the tool.

Response from Customers

The initial implementation of the tool was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and limited in-person services. Since the return of in-person services, the number of individuals accessing the Career Explorer tool has increased, and feedback from job seekers has been overwhelmingly positive. Users have expressed appreciation for the individualized recommendations related to local job

opportunities. They were excited to have an abundance of individualized career-related information in one easy-to-access location. Additionally, users enjoyed the tool's features which easily allow for the comparison of employment and training possibilities.

While long-term successes related to the tool's recommendations can be hard to track on a local level, staff strive to build professional relationships with customers which often result in their returning to share news of their successes. One such individual came to a Michigan Works! Southwest Service Center seeking assistance in determining a personal training and career goal. Staff recommended they utilize the Career Explorer tool and assisted them in reviewing the customized recommendations. Utilizing information within the tool, including local labor market information and training opportunities related to their individualized interests and skills, the individual chose to engage in a local training program and gained certification related to early childhood development. After receiving the certification, the individual gained employment at a local YMCA childcare center. The individual has since been promoted and now assists in grant writing for the organization.

AMY MEYERS

Deputy Director
Michigan Works! Southwest

SARAH POHL

Quality and Performance Monitor
Michigan Works! Southwest