



Topic:	Collaboration
Project:	Flint Healthcare Employment Opportunities (FHEO)
Location:	Flint, Michigan
Institution:	Collaborative partnership among acute and long-term health care providers, community and private colleges and nonprofit organizations
Established:	2003
Abstract:	FHEO offers insights into the challenges of collaboration in the context of operating a sectoral employment development program. This profile offers background on FHEO and the partners involved in its implementation, and outlines the competencies needed to implement a sector initiative like FHEO. The profile then discusses the elements that have been key to FHEO's ability to maintain employer involvement, and the challenges inherent in operating a collaborative structure that aspires to engage the specific talents of a diverse set of organizations. The profile closes with some lessons learned regarding the establishment of specific systems.

In the field of sectoral employment development, the Flint Healthcare Employment Opportunities project (FHEO) stands out as an initiative that has achieved active and meaningful collaboration among a wide variety of partners. Managed by the Greater Flint Health Coalition (GFHC), the GFHC and other partners representing health care employers, education providers, and community-based organizations provide a range of services that are integrated into an overall program service delivery model. Partners collaborate on program planning, management and implementation.

Current trends in public funding for sectoral workforce development initiatives increasingly promote or mandate coalition-building and development of partnerships representing workforce development service providers, the business community and other relevant institutions, and make the experiences of the FHEO particularly timely for examination and reflection.

In this *Sector Initiative Profile*, we offer sectoral employment development practitioners and policymakers information about the collaborative structure of FHEO, and discuss some of the lessons learned from the experiences of FHEO collaborators and stakeholders that we hope will interest others who are attempting to implement programming based on a collaborative model.

This profile is based on findings from a formative evaluation conducted by Aspen WSI researchers during the early years of the FHEO.

Program background

The goal of FHEO is to educate, train, place and retain underemployed and unemployed residents of the urban core of Flint, Mich. for general and clinical entry-level health care occupations. The project aims to provide sustainable opportunities for quality employment and career tracks to disadvantaged adults and, simultaneously, to address skill and labor shortages in the Flint region's hospitals and nursing homes.

The urban center of Flint, Mich. has experienced severe economic distress and extremely high rates of unemployment as a result of manufacturing industry dislocation and downsizing over the past four decades. Many residents of the area lack marketable job skills, effective personal employment networks, and knowledge about how to navigate the existing job market to obtain employment in the industries that may still provide jobs in the Flint metropolitan area. Compounding this are chronic problems in the community relating to health-related issues, lack of transportation and affordable, quality child care, perceptions and experiences with racial discrimination, and other challenges associated with unemployment, underemployment and poverty.

At the time the FHEO project was planned, three major local health care institutions (Genesys, McLaren and Hurley hospitals and health care systems) were experiencing difficulty filling a variety of patient care and other positions. These employers projected even greater future demand for skilled and credentialed employees — particularly in nursing. Perceiving an opportunity to serve unemployed Flint residents and simultaneously address some of these industry needs, a group representing educators, community-based organizations and health care providers, and supported with technical assistance by the National Economic Development and Law Center planning staff and funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, came together to design and launch the FHEO.

Current project highlights

Today FHEO's sector strategy involves a number of different activities designed to address goals that include helping low-income people get jobs and advance in health care careers, helping the local health care industry reduce turnover and meet needs for skilled workers, and working to restructure hiring, retention and promotion practices within the local health care industry.

FHEO's activities include:

- Outreach, recruitment, training and placement of low-income adults into entry-level health care positions. The entry-level program includes attitudinal and life-skills training customized for the health care employment environment, optional Certified Nursing Assistant (C.N.A.) training and certification preparation, mentoring and case management.
- Enhanced training for front-line managers who supervise entry-level workers.

- “Career Exploration” programs (at each of three major acute care facilities) to inform incumbent workers of training opportunities and career path assistance through FHEO and their respective employers.
- A scholarship program for FHEO entry-level graduates to begin to foster advancement from entry-level to mid-level positions.
- Establishing (with a recently awarded Regional Skills Alliance grant from the State of Michigan) a new training model focused on licensed practical nursing and other mid-level health care careers

FHEO’s Collaborative Structure

As a sectoral employment program, FHEO targets the health care industry — and a specific set of occupations within it — to place disadvantaged people in high quality jobs. The program is challenged to not only become but also to maintain its position as a knowledgeable participant in the local health care employer community. Credibility with both the target client population and within local industry is critical to any sectoral initiative's ability to deliver appropriate services to its two core constituencies — individuals and employers. As is common in many communities, no single institution in Flint holds the complete set of organizational capacities needed to implement the FHEO sectoral project. Successful implementation requires access to a diversity of networks, sources of information, skills, and staff capabilities, among other resources. The following box illustrates the broad range of organizational and program capacities typically needed to implement a successful sectoral initiative.

Capacities Needed to Implement FHEO

- Ability to develop comprehensive vision and multi-faceted strategy.
- Ability to communicate vision to stakeholders and lead the execution of the strategy.
- Ability to construct alliances and build consensus among diverse groups.
- Industry focus: deep knowledge of business needs and culture of industry.
 - Ability to garner trust and engage effectively with employers in the industry sector.
- Participant focus: deep knowledge of issues affecting advancement for disadvantaged, low-income individuals.
 - Ability to garner community trust and communicate effectively with low-income constituencies.
- Ability to collaborate effectively with the public workforce and welfare systems.
- Ability to deliver relevant soft skills and job-readiness training and/or provide academic education and training, including certificate and degree programs where appropriate.
- Ability to coordinate and/or deliver a range of support services for individuals, including the delivery of effective counseling/case management.
- Ability to monitor and evaluate project performance, including data collection and data management on recruitment, enrollment, graduation, individual case management, placement, retention, and other participant activities, as well as activities relating to work with employers.
- Ability to research the target industry's labor market and identify opportunities.
- Ability to manage fiscal responsibilities, including budgeting and reimbursement for a variety of partners.
- Ability to manage public relations and fund-raising.
- Ability to plan for long-range sustainability of the initiative.
- Political savvy and ability to leverage the power dynamics that impact the sector.
- Appropriate staffing, staff development and human resource management within the infrastructure of the initiative.
- Ability to design and deliver particular elements of the sectoral strategies that are appropriate to the initiative such as:
 - individual participant assessments for skills, educational preparation, and “fit” for industry occupations.
 - packaging of financial aid for education.
 - mapping out career ladders/lattices and assisting individuals to advance within the target sector.
 - conducting business/industry development services to retain and expand the number of good jobs within a sector.

FHEO partners serving individuals

To access such a wide range of capacities, FHEO draws upon the experience and skills of a number of organizations. The partners that provide direct services to FHEO participants include: The Greater Flint Health Coalition (GFHC), Faith Access to Community Economic Development (F.A.C.E.D.), Flint-STRIVE, Mott Community College and Baker College. The

following chart briefly describes each organization, its role in the FHEO, and the special capacities it brings to the partnership. In addition to the primary responsibilities listed below, all of the partners contribute staff time for collaboration on applicant screening and selection, support to participants, strategic planning, decision-making, public relations, relationship-building, monitoring of outcomes, problem-solving, etc. As FHEO strategies and programs evolve, additional partners are likely to join the collaboration to provide additional capacities.

Organizational Description	Role in FHEO	Special Capacities
GREATER FLINT HEALTH COALITION (GFHC)		
An employer-based organization whose mission is to improve the health status of Genesee County residents and to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of the health care delivery system.	GFHC is the lead organization responsible for the management and implementation of FHEO activities, and acts as the fiduciary agent for the program.	Industry-focused organization offers knowledge and expertise in regional health care sector. Strong relationships with employers. Able to convene multiple players around common goals and objectives and circulate information among a wide range of stakeholders.
Flint STRIVE		
Community-based organization that is part of a national workforce development agency with a philosophical and practical focus on the empowerment of low-income individuals and communities through employment. STRIVE's strategy centers on improving soft skills and work-readiness through attitudinal training.	Provides soft skills training for entry-level trainees, post-training job placement and counseling services, and administrative data collection. Drop-in support services available.	Experience with public workforce systems, participant data collection and management, and the use of case management documentation software. Strong community involvement.
Faith Access to Community Economic Development (F.A.C.E.D.)		
Community-based organization with services focused on meeting the comprehensive health needs of low-income residents of Flint and Genesee County.	Provides outreach, recruitment, screening and mentoring services to entry-level trainees.	Deep ties to urban Flint community, primarily through African-American churches. Equipped to offer a range of supportive services. Experience working with the public workforce development system and other community-based organizations.
Mott Community College		
Community college serving the Flint metropolitan region.	Conducts entry-level training for CNAs and training for mid-level health care tech jobs.	Provides higher education, possesses knowledge about financial aid, can provide skills assessment and remedial education, and can provide mentoring to active students.
Baker College		
Private 2-year college serving the Flint metropolitan region.	Training for mid-level health care tech jobs including LVNs. Tests entry-level students for basic skills appropriate to health care careers using the WorkKeys exam.	Provides higher education, possesses knowledge about financial aid, can provide skills assessment and remedial education, and can provide mentoring to active students.

Employer engagement

Flint-area health care employers play an integral role in the FHEO collaboration. The hallmark of FHEO's approach is its deep connection to the health care industry and its ability to address issues and concerns of employers as well as workers.

FHEO has been able to attract and sustain the collaboration of the three major acute care systems in the Flint-region: Genesys Regional Medical Center, McLaren Regional Medical Center, and Hurley Medical Center. In addition, FHEO's outreach has expanded over time to extend services to several smaller long-term care facilities. Employers participate on several FHEO decision-making committees, and they are actively involved in guiding strategy and programming.

A few examples serve to illustrate the deep and purposeful connection Flint health care employers have demonstrated to FHEO. To learn more about the practical underpinnings of a sectoral approach to workforce development and inform their work with FHEO, employer representatives traveled to San Antonio, Texas to study the experiences of Project QUEST, a well-established sectoral employment organization. They have shared their own internal information and curricula from existing incumbent worker training programs to replicate programs such as Hurley Medical Center's "Career Exploration Program" among the other participating hospital systems. To address internal issues related to hiring members of the FHEO target population group, these employers have conducted focus groups among their supervisory staff and have hosted FHEO-sponsored programs to educate supervisors about the special issues faced by disadvantaged workers that affect their experiences in the workplace.

Three principal factors have influenced FHEO's ability to engage employers. The first is the presence of a high-profile employer champion. Norma Hagenow, the Chief Executive Officer of Genesys Regional Medical Center, promotes the project locally among other employers and the media and has publicly embraced the sector strategy as a public workforce development model. She also chairs the FHEO Implementation Committee, which acts in many ways as a Board of Directors for FHEO.

The second factor that contributes to FHEO's strong degree of employer involvement is the selection of the GFHC as the lead agency for the project. GFHC's Board of Directors includes community leaders from government, hospitals, labor, business, insurers, physicians, education, consumers and the faith-based community. Prior to the creation of FHEO, the Coalition had developed strong relationships with local health care employers and was already familiar with the business practice and culture within the sector. In undertaking FHEO, the GFHC went through a conscious decision-making process to ensure that the work of the project fit within its overall organizational mission and to ensure support from its existing membership constituency.

The third, and perhaps most important way in which FHEO seeks to sustain employer involvement is by attempting to develop programs that address key business needs. The majority of FHEO's employer partners first became involved with FHEO because they believe that they have a corporate responsibility to be a good neighbor to individuals within their community. Increasingly, most hope that the FHEO project will address labor shortages for mid-level technical staff and value the presence of a larger pool of qualified entry-level applicants. FHEO recognizes that employer involvement will be sustained over time only if the program is able to

meet these expectations and add real value to employers. Initially, FHEO focused on training entry-level workers in response to a perceived unmet need for Certified Nursing Assistants. As economic and labor market conditions have changed, FHEO has responded to new information about current employer needs by offering incumbent worker training, scholarships for career advancement, and initiating a Licensed Practical Nurse training program.

As programs such as FHEO work to engage employers and be of service to employers, it remains critical, but can become increasingly difficult, to remain focused on the ultimate goal of their work. For FHEO, that goal is to address the chronic unemployment and underemployment experienced by residents of Flint. To address these goals in a way that is sustainable over time, sector employment initiatives often prompt employers to engage in meaningful systemic change within their own businesses and industry sectors. Remaining mission-focused means that FHEO looks for opportunities to promote change in employment practices and job quality where benefits to individuals can converge with gains for employers. Having reached a level of significant employer buy-in and participation, FHEO has put forth an objective for 2005 “to work with health care employers to restructure the industry’s hiring, retention and promotional practices.” They are well-positioned to engage in meaningful dialogue with employers toward this objective.

Challenges for agility, adaptability, management

While a collaborative approach can be one of the great strengths of a sectoral initiative, it also can be the source of some of the most difficult challenges. To a large extent, FHEO makes decisions through a committee structure. Managing and maintaining active participation, cooperation and understanding among the multiple partners requires the dedication of resources by all parties. The key decision-making committees within FHEO include:

- Implementation Committee (project oversight)
- Partners Committee (new entrant training)
- Incumbent Worker Training Committee
- Supervisory Skills Committee
- Scholarship Committee

As lead partner, GFHC constantly must seek to balance its efforts to build consensus with its charge to assume ultimate responsibility for the program, demonstrate leadership and, assert authority to make decisions. As FHEO has matured and evolved, GFHC leadership has had to learn about and respond to a range of challenges to achieve or maintain this important balance and ensure efficient and effective allocation of scarce resources among the members of the partnership. This has been especially important in the context of shifting priorities such as in response to changing labor market conditions or as the partnership responds to new learning that arises in the course of project implementation. It is a major challenge and especially important to be able to reflect as a group on implementation experiences and to be able to candidly sort out issues relating to partner performance versus issues relating to changes in the environment. Facilitating and participating in this type of ongoing dialogue can be difficult, but progress toward overall goals has rested on the FHEO partners’ ability to be critical and self-critical in constructive forums.

Challenges that relate to differences in organizational culture and capacity

In the early years of FHEO, organizational distinctions caused tensions along three primary dimensions: differences in organizational missions and attendant priorities, differences in financial resources and financing structure, and differences in organizational policies and practices regarding communication and decision-making.

Each of the partners in the collaboration has its own set of core values and vision that support its primary work. Not unexpectedly, FHEO has experienced tensions among the distinct missions, philosophies and cultures of the individual organizations versus those that are shared within FHEO. For example, FHEO has a screening process that has evolved to become more stringent over time (e.g., seeking to enroll only individuals with strong aptitudes for work in the health care field). For Flint-STRIVE, whose primary mission is to serve *any* individual with barriers to employment, this presents a real conflict. FHEO has managed such issues by explicitly recognizing and discussing them among partners. In this case, the group eventually reached consensus on the screening for purposes of this program and agreed that some partners would continue to offer alternative services to those for whom this training is not currently appropriate. FHEO also is working on systems to improve communication, which hopefully will diminish the occurrence of these issues in the future.

Each program partner within a collaborative structure likely will operate within a distinct institutional context as relates to project financing. For example, unlike larger institutions, such as community colleges, community-based organizations with typically low levels of unrestricted funds or cash reserves on hand may be more affected by the types of mid-course changes in programming that characterize the nimbleness of a successful sectoral program. In the case of FHEO, the partners have learned that management of project budgeting and payment/reimbursement systems must recognize the operational constraints of each partner, particularly in relation to needs for notification and cash flow.

Differences in organizational structure and culture also can impact the way decisions are made within each institution. Some partners within the FHEO collaboration have one individual with the authority and responsibility to make decisions and take action regarding the project. Others have more rigid, bureaucratic or hierarchical structures which make for slower decision-making and implementation processes. FHEO is challenged to manage the tension between addressing these needs of the partners and adapting quickly to changes in opportunities in the Flint area health care industry environment as they arise.

FHEO recognized these tensions and negotiated through them, but the process of doing so made the need for clear and consistent systems more apparent.

Need for systems

As mentioned above, FHEO required a mix of partners in order to have the full range of capacities needed to effectively meet the needs of both Flint area employers and the city's low-income adults. The challenge of involving a broad network of partners is to make program management efficient by building management systems that enable the lead agency to lead while continuing to draw on the strengths of the group of partners. Developing these systems requires

dedicated time from the leadership of the initiative as well as resources. To date, FHEO has worked to develop inter-organizational systems in the following areas:

Support Services. In order to help individuals obtain and retain employment, FHEO provides a range of support services during and after skills training. Various partners in the collaboration have capacity to offer support services, some of which are drawn upon for the purposes of FHEO. The reality is that participants interface with several institutions during their relationship with the program. And this means that they develop personal relationships with staff performing a number of roles. While these wide-ranging relationships are absolutely beneficial to individuals, they pose a major challenge to developing a coordinated case management and support system that can also document the experiences of individuals so FHEO can ensure that needs are addressed effectively and equitably. In order to combine the resources and experience of the collaborating organizations and make it clear to both individuals and hiring employers what is available, FHEO has been working to develop a cohesive strategy. Some of the actions taken include hiring a case worker whose focus extends across organizations, and communicating more clearly with trainees and employers hiring graduates about what the FHEO support system consists of and who is their contact for assistance.

Uniform standards and procedures for budgeting and invoicing. In a collaborative project, creating accounting systems and fiscal oversight can be a major and critical challenge — especially when the collaborative receives public funds and must comply with a variety of potentially complicated regulatory and reporting requirements. But more importantly, perceived inequities in this area can be a cause of great tension. Uniform and transparent budgeting and accounting procedures are essential to build trust and understanding among the partners. FHEO is striving to ensure that its budgetary and fiscal management systems are communicated clearly to all partners.

Data management and collection. With a complex network of partners, an initiative such as FHEO needs data for overall program coordination and management, to understand outcomes, and to hold partners accountable to one another. To create and sustain a culture of accountability and results, the FHEO has struggled to design and implement data collection and reporting procedures as well as a system for data management and information access among the multiple partners. Some of the specific challenges have included designing a system that: enhances the existing capacities of the range of partners, does not create burdensome duplication of effort, remains current, and provides ongoing results that can be shared on a regular basis. After attempting to implement internally developed systems and tools, FHEO has now contracted with the University of Michigan in Flint to design a data monitoring system that addresses the project's unique needs.

Sectoral Employment Initiatives and Collaboration

The field of sectoral employment is expanding as nonprofit organizations, state agencies, community colleges and others recognize the value of applying strategies that combine economic and workforce development programs within particular industry sectors to improve opportunities for low-income workers and disadvantaged job-seekers. Given the complex nature of addressing opportunities and challenges within industries and labor markets, there is a strong push toward greater collaboration among multiple players with a range of expertise and resources. As a sector

initiative that has been successful in involving an impressive mix of active collaborators, the case of the Flint Healthcare Employment Opportunities (FHEO) project is helpful in illuminating some of the benefits and challenges of this type of collaboration.



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This profile was made possible by a
grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

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