

Providing Training to Incarcerated Individuals for Careers in the Asphalt and Concrete Industry Upon Release

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UConn

Project Sponsorship

- Project sponsored by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration

Project Partnerships

- Connecticut DOT
- Federal Highway Administration
- Connecticut Department of Corrections
- Connecticut Construction Industries Association
- University of Connecticut

Workforce Challenges – Transportation Construction

- Workforce shortages are plaguing the construction industries
- Transportation construction has limited opportunities to tap into workers with knowledge or experience
- Most entry level people have zero experience in highway construction
 - Require a fair amount of investment to get them up-to-speed
- Finding people that want to work on transportation construction is a very real problem
- Inmates released who have stable employment are much less likely to end up back in legal trouble

How Did We Get Involved?

- Had an existing project with CT DOT for Workforce Development
 - Mostly focused on high schools and young adult learners with an asphalt focus
 - The opportunity presented itself to develop a program to be delivered to incarcerated individuals nearing the end of their sentence
 - Choose to do asphalt first as we had the most experience with that and could quickly launch the program
- CT DOC – Vocational Village Program

This Was Not Your Normal Training Program

- We run training programs all of the time, but not like this...
- Needed to work with the constraints of doing this in a Correctional Institution
- Needed to make sure there would be opportunities for the participants when they were released

Initial Hurdles

- Asphalt Testing requires specialized equipment that is really not easy to transport in and out of a prison
- Needed to get buy-in from my people who would do the training
- Needed to get permission to bring prisoners to UConn
 - Required MOUs
- DOC Inspected our lab several times to understand potential escape routes and for items that could be used as weapons
- Needed to secure equipment and have minimal equipment out
- Needed to coordinate this effort with other educational programs being run in the prison

Selection of Participants

- Needed to be near the end of their sentence
- Had to have clearance to leave the facility
 - For CT DOC – 17 step process before the Warden considers signing off
- Had to express interest in the program
- Where were the reentry participants going to live on release relative to where the employment opportunities are located
- Asked reentry participants if they would have transportation to get to job locations upon release
- DOC did a great job of selecting participants

First Asphalt Group

- Used NETTCP Plant Technician Manual for a reference book
- 1 Virtual Introductory Session
- 6 Classroom periods of 2 hours each – focus on asphalt properties
- 3 Trips to the CAP Lab for hands-on instruction
 - Producers invited to the last hands-on session to interact with the participants
- Mini-job fair
 - 3 Producers participated
 - DOC Councilors provided assistance with building a resume and interviewing skills

Lessons Learned from First Cohort

- You need to do deliver on your promises
- A significant learning experience from our perspective
- Very rigid environment
- Engaging the participants is key
- Reliable transportation to get to work on release is vital
- Not easy to track where the formerly incarcerated end up once their sentence is completed

Second Asphalt Cohort

- We tweaked things a little bit from the first cohort
- We added CTDOT Coring and Sampling Certification
- Individuals reentering the workforce were even more into the program
- The need for transportation was emphasized even more
- Second-chance training participants read the entire NETTCP manual from cover-to-cover on their own as they wanted to learn as much as possible

Year 2 – Added ACI Field Technician Grade 1 Certification

- Easier to bring concrete testing equipment into the prison as we needed it
- Needed a place where we could make a mess
- Used mud rather than concrete for the hands-on portion
- Used similar criteria for participants as the asphalt program
- 4 Classroom sessions of 2 hours each
- 4 Lab sessions of 2 hours each
- Brought individuals reentering the workforce to UConn for mock exam (Written and Proficiency)
- Conducted the ACI Exam at UConn

Lessons from ACI Course

- 2 of the 6 incarcerated individuals passed both the written and proficiency
- All six passed the proficiency exam
- Examiners were very impressed by the participants readiness for the proficiency exam
- Did not take into account the turn around time to get results back from ACI
- Ended up a little off with timing as one or two second-chance training participants had been released before we could schedule re-test on the written exam
- Need to focus on improving test taking skills for the participants
 - ACI certification more involved
 - Would add one or two more classroom sessions to help with the written exam

Programs Offered To Date

- 2 Asphalt Groups
 - Second asphalt group focused a little more on field operations
- 1 ACI Field Technician Grade 1
- 1 Flagger Certification
 - Have our own certified flagger instructor
 - Flagger certification went well, but really challenging to line up potential employers
 - Probably won't be including this again

What Do You Need to Make This Happen

- Need to get all of the stakeholders together and make sure everyone is committed to making it happen
- Requires a fair amount of effort for DOC
- Training group has to be capable and reliable
- Industry must be a part of this because if they are not interested in hiring these folks – not much you can do

This Is an Amazing Team Effort

“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit”

Harry S. Truman

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What Were My Takeaways

- Participants were fully engaged and really wanted to be a part of this
- All of the partners in this program were fully committed to making this work
- All of my folks really enjoyed the experience and felt good about trying to make difference in people's lives
- Have to come to terms with the idea that not everyone is going to succeed
- We only spent a little bit of time with the individuals reentering the workforce, but it was amazing to see their growth
- Given the enthusiasm of the second-chance hiring participants – this is a great opportunity for all parties
- The mini-job fairs were very special events
- The program is going to continue

Thank You!

If anyone would like to discuss further and get more details, please feel free to reach out to me

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