

-FINAL REPORT-
**Evaluation of the
Career Readiness to Eliminate
Disparities (CRED) Program of
Heartland Workforce Solutions
(HWS) Year 4
2020**

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PRPG

CRED Final Evaluation Report Year 4

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In early 2017, 2018 and 2019, the HWS Board of Directors was presented respective overviews of the Career Readiness to Eliminate Disparities (CRED) Program Evaluation. In all three evaluation reports, PRPG outlined both the program's yearly successes along with suggestions to further build on the program for the upcoming year(s). The following pages provide a brief overview of PRPG findings from the 2017-2019 evaluations.

2017 Evaluation:

Finding 1: Good effort toward engaging Stakeholders.

There was a great deal of effort toward engaging a number of stakeholders in the CRED initiative. In addition, the culmination of businesses that signed onto recommend or recognize the NCRC was a key beginning for the success of the CRED program, of which NCRC was a critical piece. It was difficult to identify whether this outreach is "successful" in year one, as there were no benchmarks available to the researchers by which to judge these numbers. Nevertheless, these preliminary numbers gave some basis for future efforts that could help to identify the number of stakeholders (or potential stakeholders) in the community going forward.

Finding 2: Good "Buy-In" from Employers.

It was clear that the employees we spoke with believed deeply in the goals and efforts of HWS and in the CRED program. They not only viewed this as a "win" for their individual company, but also deeply believed in the value of engaging the community. Some of the employers were eager to recruit additional employers, and spoke very knowledgably and positively about the CRED program specifically, and about the larger goals of HWS more generally. Literature suggests that employers and companies who are invested in the health and well-being of the community long-term tend to be more successful in retaining employees from that

community, (as well as in successfully maintaining their goals), and HWS and its CRED program built a solid foundation with business partners in the city.

Finding 3: Employers Desire More Communication & Involvement

There was a desire on behalf of the employers to increase the amount of communication with HWS. This included the desire to be included regarding “trends,” as well as efforts to recruit additional business partners into the program. Several verbalized that they would welcome consistent, long-term evaluation visits and meetings to regularly assess the progress of the program through their business.

In addition, some of the employers believed that earlier communication with potential employees through their schools was critical to long-term success. It was suggested that even middle school may not be too early to begin employer engagement, as many students may already be considering employment options by this time. For the most part, this idea was shared by Omaha Public Schools and Metro Community College. Communication early and often with students in the Omaha Public Schools, and into high school and beyond was seen as a necessary element to long-term success.

Finding 4: Desire to Head off Retention Issues.

Several of the employers felt that, even though they believed in the CRED program, that they worried about disconnect *after* employees were hired. Most notably, these employers are dealing with high turnover in their companies, and the CRED workers were also at risk. To this end, some wondered about expanding the program to include ongoing “coaching” or another way to ensure that employees have bigger “buy-in” to the company they are working for.

Finding 5: More Discussion about “Root Problems”

One of the most poignant themes from employers was that they believed that any program that aimed to address workforce disparity, as well as un and under-employment would have a difficult time succeeding unless it also addressed “root” problems that affected the health of the larger community. This may include issues such as neighborhood infrastructure, transportation, housing and crime. These “outside” influences, while much more complex and systemic, were seen as one of the largest barriers to successful, sustained employment training and employer progress. And while there was an understandable sentiment among employers that there was limited power they had over these root problems, several believed it was imperative that the employers and HWS engage with other groups that are concentrated on many of these problems. For instance, making sure that HWS / CRED was well-represented at any talks or meetings where issues such as city transportation, housing developments or crime reduction were addressed so that the information could be incorporated into the broader CRED plans.

2018 Evaluation:

Employer Participation

Finding 1: Designing and utilizing assessment of “Employer Tools”

The employer interviews suggested that the employers who were more familiar with the CRED strategy were very pleased to be able to trust the process to appropriately identify, screen and begin to socialize employees. It was also evident that these employers desired more broad participation in the CRED strategy, especially in expanding it and acting as “conduits” for the strategy, which they clearly buy into. Conversely, those employers who were not as familiar or engaged with the process seemed to indicate that they wanted more participation at the *employee* level, with more access to potential workers.

Finding 2: Consider a “speaker’s bureau” of very engaged employers

In addition to utilizing the employer tools in particular ways based on employer level of engagement, we might suggest finding ways in which very engaged employers can more formally become spokespeople for the CRED strategy to other businesses. We recognize, of course, that this is being done already through informal avenues, because those employers who were less engaged testified to the notion that it was the influence of the more engaged employers that made them ultimately become involved.

Finding 3: Standardize “CRED” brand / Explain relationship between strategy and initiatives

Standardizing the branding of the CRED strategy would help employees to more readily get on board and become involved. Because many of the employers were not familiar with the term “CRED” as a strategy, we discussed this at a team meeting, and it was noted that the term “CRED Strategy” was more of an internal tool rather than one utilized in external marketing or engagement. We suggested that creating a clear and consistent “brand” for the CRED strategy would be helpful for employers as well as other potential supporters of the program.

Expansion of Early Involvement

Finding 4: Begin conversations about high school/middle school involvement

Feedback from participants indicated that access to components such as the NCRC may be helpful earlier for potential employees, and information from employers indicate that they share this sentiment. Knowing their skill level and also their skill area in high school (or even earlier) may help students to make choices that would fit with their skill set. Tracking this information specifically in targeted zip codes would be even more informational. It would be important to set up this process so that students were not “funneled” away from other career or education choices,

but giving them the tools to know their strengths may be of help with entering the workforce after their schooling.

Finding 5: Continue conversations surrounding re-entry

The CRED initiative may be able to expand into re-entry, engaging individuals returning into their communities after incarceration. We recommended incorporating a comprehensive assessment to identify the ways in which the CRED strategy might be introduced alongside other re-entry programs, and also closely tracking these individuals to determine success longer-term.

Retention Plan

Finding 6: Explore possibility of “retention specialist”

In both the interviews with potential employees and employers in 2018, there emerged a desire for additional or ongoing training or education throughout the first few years of employment. As noted, one employer even recommended a “retention specialist” to look at ways in which retention could be tracked and improved.

Finding 7: Explore possibility of “cross-training” for CRED participants, , encourage ways to facilitate education about company/industry

Several potential CRED participants expressed a desire to be given the opportunity to learn more about the company. We would recommend exploration with some companies the possibility of either “cross-training” CRED individuals who have done a good job after a certain number of months, or offering the possibility of seminars or other educational opportunities that would allow employees to both see the “big picture” of the company that they work in and also be able to articulate the even larger picture of the company’s place within that industry.

Finding 8: Look at implementing “early warning”

Companies may be interested in the possibility of investing in an “early warning” system for employees, or at least to discuss implementing some aspects of early warning systems (such as yearly climate surveys, implementing outsourced exit interviews, etc.). We believe that if the CRED strategy team could offer to employers some specifics on how to head off or deal with retention issues for both CRED participants and all of their employees, it would offer a substantive “carrot” for employers who may be “on the fence” about participating in the program.

Finding 9: Better specify how to measure/advertise retention rates

Rather than an “overall retention” rate without reference to how many employees each company has hired, using a more standard “6 month” retention rate (although this could be 3, 6 and 12 months) as a cohort retention would help for comparison purposes. This would also provide an opportunity for better identification of what point in their tenure these employees tend to leave. In turn, this would allow the CRED strategy to zero in on where extra support for these individuals might be most needed, and pass that along to the employers.

Engagement with Other Groups

Finding 10: Begin to articulate how CRED strategy fits with other groups

It was clear both from the interviews with the employers as well as the public presentations (and requests for presentations by the CRED team) that HWS and MCC have engaged a great deal with other groups in the Omaha metro community, and are very well regarded in the city and beyond. As a true “backbone organization” HWS has maintained their commitment not only to their organizational goals, but also to those of others in the community.

While it is clear that both HWS and MCC, who we have worked with most closely, have close ties to other community organizations and entities such as the Empowerment Network, the Urban League, OPS, Douglas County, and a host of others, we are not sure if there is a clear action plan that sharply identifies how the CRED strategy might fit with other areas that address distinct root problems that our community has struggled with. Creating a space where consistent and systematic discussion of this effort may be a lofty goal, considering all the efforts underway already, but may be one that pays off in the long run.

Finding 11: Begin researching data collection software

Strategic Data Collection

Creating a database that strategically and systematically collects data especially on participants would allow the CRED team, including the research team, to obtain information about individuals in real time, and would be useful for identifying areas of improvement as well as gleaning information that could be shared about the program. Our recommendation in this area would be, for the short term, to begin exploring data collection tools that are user-friendly and that have the ability to interface with many other platforms.

Finding 12: Explore similar data collection options/ work with employers/other agencies to identify shared goals

In addition, the CRED team had a number of discussions about the value of utilizing a data collection system that would have the ability to interact with other agencies. These could be used in such a way as to fully identify individuals' needs, and the various agencies that could help to meet those needs. This would truly be data collection based on a larger goal of collective impact, and would ultimately aid in long-term partnerships that could substantially benefit the community

in a number of ways. Ideally, a number of agencies would have input and oversight over a common data collection tool, understanding that there are few that may meet various needs of a number of agencies, and that other considerations (such as privacy concerns) would need to be addressed.

Finding 13: Articulate CRED strategy as distinct from CRED/other initiatives

CRED Strategy/Initiative Clarification

As additional materials and even more specific programs spring from the CRED strategy to address needs of the populations served, it may be more likely for currently unengaged businesses, prospective participants and the community at large to become confused between the CRED strategy and the different aspects of the *programs and initiatives* that comprise that strategy. It would be helpful to develop either an infographic or larger presentation that clearly and succinctly identifies the CRED strategy as an overarching “umbrella” that comprises such initiatives as the CPP, Workforce Ready Communities, etc. as well as programs such as the Career Training Academies, the NCRC, etc. This would also allow the evaluation to have a much clearer “road map” of how the various elements of the CRED strategy fit and should be evaluated.

Finding 14: Create evaluation meeting schedule that is frequent and consistent

More Fluid Evaluation Process

Consistent and frequent meetings with the CRED team prove beneficial, and recommended the invitees include, perhaps, very engaged employers do help strategize, or even participants if they are able. Their input in the context of these group meetings might offer unique insight regarding how the evaluation might be better executed (or conversely, what has gone well with the evaluation).

Finding 15: Re-evaluate evaluation goals quarterly

Finally, because the CRED strategy has the potential to change and many unforeseen opportunities may arise, we would recommend actually re-visiting the evaluation goals on a quarterly basis, along with the quarterly report. This past year, the evaluation kept the same goals and the quarterly reports identified the progress made on these goals, but it was clear that by the end of the year, those goals needed to be updated to better assess some of the new opportunities and directions that were taking place.

2019 Evaluation:

Finding 1: Continue to standardize “CRED” brand, explain relationship between HWS and CRED as a Collective Impact strategy

Less engaged businesses and potential agencies/partners were not particularly familiar with the CRED team, and tended to conflate CRED with HWS. Standardizing the branding of the CRED strategy would help potential collaborative partners (including those doing re-entry work) to more readily get on board and become involved in the collective impact model.

Finding 2: Expand on conversations surrounding re-entry

There are a number of entities in the metropolitan area focused on re-entry, and the CRED team would do well to continue dialogue with them as they move toward a collaborative network of partners.

Finding 3: Continue to explore data collection software options

A shared platform could fully identify individuals’ needs, while highlighting the various agencies that could help to meet those needs, substantially benefitting the community. Ideally, a number of agencies with overlapping goals would have input and oversight over this common data collection

tool.

Finding 4: Continue to identify and work with other agencies, more systematically identify shared goals (consistent with Collective Impact strategy)

The CRED strategy has increased momentum among businesses and partners after the Work Ready Community designation, and the successful growth of the CPP is notable. There is a need to more clearly define this among mutually interested agencies and community leaders. Given that the collective impact approach requires developing a shared set of goals/shared strategy among participating entities, the CRED team (particularly HWS as the backbone of the network) can use this momentum to further identify and translate shared goals among the diverse array of current and potential employers, partners and community leaders.

2020 Evaluation Data and Methodology

The 2017 report primarily looked at data from quarterly reports and employer interviews, and the 2018 report used semi-structured interviews with potential (and current) CRED participants, employers to complement quarterly reports and data. The 2019 evaluation included semi structured interviews with employers, partners, and community leaders alongside HWS/MCC data to assess the overall impact and effectiveness of the Work Ready Communities Initiative, the Career Placement Pipeline (CPP) and the ultimate goal of the CRED strategy being an ultimately self-sustaining Collective Impact Approach with HWS continuing to operate as a backbone.

In the 2020 evaluation, we asked CRED team members to respond to pointed questions relative to their stated assessment goals, which have necessarily been reformed due to the unprecedented pandemic and its ensuing challenges to workforce development and employment opportunities (see Appendix C).

Cred 2020 Overview Reports

Cred Accomplishments – By the Numbers

While the year 2020 has certainly brought unprecedented hardships to the global human populace, it has also posed unique challenges to workforce development in already disproportionately affected communities. The current report uses some of the information gleaned in the quarterly and final reports created by HWS with input from MCC, but it is important to note that much more specific numbers regarding CPP, NCRC and Employer contacts have been collated in a separate report submitted by HWS.

During the 1st quarter of 2019, the Career Readiness to Eliminate Disparities (CRED) initiative worked with community agencies to address the needs of affected individuals with creative and (where possible) virtual innovations for both career seekers and businesses searching for qualified employees. HWS was one of only a small number of job centers across the country who were able to remain open during the pandemic, while navigating barriers to service delivery, virtual NCRC testing development and proxy issues, and spacing and distancing challenges.

By May 2020, “high-poverty / high-unemployment zip codes that HWS targets” [represented] “70% of Omaha’s unemployment claims from 2020,” and “initial unemployment claims in the first two weeks of the pandemic crisis nearly reached the total for the entire 2019 calendar year of 41,727” (HWS CRED Report). Thus for much of the year, HWS and the CRED team had all hands on deck to help disaffected and vulnerable individuals who faced not only potential illness, but also job loss, and disproportionate barriers to internet access and/or technology. HWS assisted unemployment applicants via telephone, on-site services and a temporary site via its partnership with Metropolitan Community College in the CRED program.

Overall, career seekers, businesses and community partners/nonprofits continue to engage through the Career Placement Pipeline (CPP) program in increasingly virtual formats, while navigating the particular circumstances that apply to all involved.

1) *Priority Responses to Workforce Development in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era*

The CRED team sought to evaluate how they have served career seekers with employment resources and connections in 2020, and how they might continue to build on these responses as needed. While working with employers and business services, the CRED team has also worked to make sure that information about job services and training were available both virtually and on site. Virtual platforms (hosted for free) and drive thru career center events drew roughly 800 job seekers as of November 2020.

Central to this goal was a way to help career seekers with further access to technology to those who need it. Given that the social distancing guidelines mean that there are very few (if any) in-person interviews taking place, the CRED team has worked to better equip the center with more technology/access to it. Their goal is to be able to have everything pre-downloaded (Zoom, etc.) so that job seeking and interviewing can be done as seamlessly as possible.

Since March, the NCRC also came to a full halt (college closed, no virtual tests, etc.). At the start of the closure, ACT had difficulty figuring out virtual proxy, then compatibility issues (the ACT functioned on Macs, while the testing centers were equipped with incompatible tablets). The team (via MCC) is now contracted with ACT to do a pilot of virtual NCRC testing.

Overall, the CRED team has been effective and innovative in its maximizing of the HWS website, virtual job fairs, virtual certification/testing, virtual training, and virtual interviews for career seekers and community/business partners during the pandemic. At the same time the team has also worked to improve timelines for those seeking employment opportunities; so that

individuals can access a faster, more swift connection to training, certification and employment. The new application process (via HWS website) will assist career seekers in completing their application within two minutes. At this point (December 2020), the Career Placement Program (CPP) is fully virtually optimized, and the team is utilizing Best Practices in training. Going forward (2021), the team is looking to launch a program using the CPP model where CNAs, RPNs, LPNs, etc. can both get ground up certification and continuing credentials (also financial literacy, mock interviews, etc. when needed) in a week-long training program. While at this point the training would be unpaid, the team is looking for a program that might be able to sponsor it.

The CRED team also aimed to both increase and adjust the number of places that Career Seekers could be served with career opportunities in 2020. While their overall goal has been to work toward a One Stop Workforce System, the pandemic has also spurred novel innovations that assist toward their ultimate goal. The team is currently at an early stage of ensuring that the initial points of contact get the needed training to direct people appropriately (referral connections), along with developing the framework for follow up procedures to ensure that people's needs are met. Given that there are multiple non-profit and governmental/grant funding sources wherein seekers might qualify, along with a myriad of business and community partners who might also cover funding for particular circumstances, this is surely a large undertaking. However, it will certainly help people in the targeted zip codes to enter through multiple locations and connect to training, aid, and employment opportunities. While the CPP is virtually optimized at this point, the CRED team also recognized that several affected Career Seekers have potentially little or no access to technology or wi-fi, so they also supplemented their virtual efforts with printed flyers at the Urban League, MCC, HWS, and in faith communities.

2) Effects of Unemployment Insurance Benefits on Workforce Development

HWS was almost entirely consumed with individuals seeking Unemployment Insurance Benefits for much of 2020, while also hiring and training new staff (due to Covid-19). As one CRED team member noted, however, the hard work of the past three years have been instrumental in systematizing the way that the community can move forward. The way that CARES dollars came into the community, for example, was heavily influenced by CRED team's example (career coaching, business engagement, and training to employment), and further, influenced how the training initiative was administered throughout the state.

The CRED team also looked for insight from the ways that other ACT Work Ready Communities who had experienced an abrupt and widespread disruption in the community handled widespread issues (such as Joplin, MO following a 2011 tornado). One CRED member noted that Joplin was able to use the Workkeys and NCRC, but Covid-19 flipped the script on this process (with the lack of virtual proxy testing and mandatory distancing/etc.). However, the same team member noted that Joplin recognized that there would be several recovery jobs – i.e., jobs that could be retooled and repurposed to get people back to work while revitalizing the community. HyVee said they are ready to hire 20,000 people to help do inoculations, so the CRED team is looking at part of the recovery in our community to include the Pharm-tech program. While the community will not need 20,000 people to do shots forever, the training offers next steps to help people advance. This short training program can get people connected to the workforce system; whereas Joplin repurposed construction, here it is starting to look a lot like it will be the health services industry.

3) Collective Response to Recovery Efforts

Roughly seven million CARES Act community college dollars come into our community. In about 3 months, MCC helped 3,548 individuals with training. It took a collective effort (250 business partners and still growing), with CRED coming in to utilize training dollars and leverage them with GAP funds and the CARES scholarship. It required an effort with community colleges, unions, CRED, mayor's office, etc. The CRED team did a lot of work leveraging people, resources and employment, and overall, there were dozens of newly approved training programs, and between MCC and CRED, over 3,000 students were able to receive roughly 85% of the funds to cover the costs (note: the next closest community college was only able to serve 400 people.).

The Chamber Thrive & Talent Availability/ Philadelphia Works study has further identified that women minorities (esp. African Americans) are the slowest to get reconnected with employment (March 2019). This study helps speak to the urgency/focus that CRED must have relative to this flexible funding to specifically connect to areas of higher employment, especially during this time. Thrive highlighted four focal points around recovery efforts in our community. They are actively recruiting business to support this effort with the Chamber, and two of the CRED team will be reaching out to these businesses to be Work Ready Community Partners in 2020/2021.

4) Impact of COVID-19 on Employers and Businesses Engagement

The CRED team also worked toward tailoring how the workforce system could be more responsive to employer needs/ businesses still urgently hiring during the pandemic. The CRED team has coordinated and organized multiple drive-thru and virtual job fairs, and moved toward checking out computers/laptops with embedded training to those who need it. They host best practices in Zoom interview training. They have also coordinated multiple virtual trainings (such as virtual

forklift training), and are scheduled to implement (Feb 2021) a CPP plan with MCC for a myriad of healthcare trainings/certifications.

The CRED team has also identified several industries where the workforce system has opportunities to develop and grow in 2021 and beyond. Pharmacy tech and the medical field are ripe areas for individuals seeking certifications, employment and career advancements, and the CRED team is currently developing Career Placement Pipeline (CPP) health care training programs for positions such as medical receptionist, medical billing/coding, health information management systems, CNA, and LPN. Enrolled individuals will often be able to get ground up certification and continuing credentials (including financial literacy, mock interviews) within a week, including a line for individuals who have a criminal record, and/or drug/alcohol issues. While the training is typically unpaid, the CRED team is looking for a program to eventually sponsor it.

The CRED team noted that they would like to develop a similar training and certification model for IT – another burgeoning field for potential career placement and advancement. They note that IT will require more training than industries such as construction, and are beginning to think about ways that they can build and improve education and training programs that engaged IT businesses can invest in going forward. Further, the CRED team asserts that there are multiple avenues for both employment and career advancement within the area of customer service, and with many current positions starting at \$16-\$17/hour with multiple business partners (including Northend Teleservices and Mutual of Omaha), which opens up many possibilities for disproportionately affected individuals whom the CRED team works to serve.

The recent Talent Availability and Job Market Reporting and Analysis for the Greater Omaha Area (December 7, 2020) demonstrated that African Americans have by far disproportionately

affected during the pandemic, and the CRED team will be highly engaged with the resulting (emerging) economic development initiative (specific to north Omaha) to help inform community needs, opportunities, and how to best engage (relevant) businesses with Career Seekers.

For this CRED's Career Placement Pipeline (CPP) model demonstrates successful processes that are already in place that support employees through education and training (Hard Hat in Hands, for example). They have demonstrated over the course of the last three plus years that the viability of partnerships is most pronounced when training programs (developed and facilitated through MCC), HWS and businesses work in partnership with aligned outcomes. Seriously engaged businesses are fully implementing More recently, Tyson has implemented a pilot program in ten of its facilities across the country based on the CRED-developed CPP/Best Practices model, including a noncredit CPP for mechanical engineering, hiring an embedded career skills coach, hosting 2 programs for GED/ELL, and allowing employees to work half days while receiving training/being in relevant classes (Newswire Feb. 4, 2021). The team notes that not all businesses are interested in (or require) this level of engagement, and the CRED team will do well to help inform the economic development initiative concerning which various levels of partnership will fit best in various circumstances.

Brief Summary of 2020 Evaluation

The CRED team did exceedingly well while operating under unprecedented circumstances in 2020; that HWS was able to remain open while similar job centers in the country were not is certainly laudable. To underscore this, they were able to efficiently optimize the Career Placement Pipeline for a virtual audience, increase access to needed technology, develop and administer virtual training (including a transition to online certification programs, virtual interview coaching,

transforming space at HWS to hold virtual Zoom interviews and meetings, etc.), and (via MCC) work to pilot a virtual NCRC for ACT. The demonstrated efficacy of the CPP/Best Practices method in the targeted zip codes from 2017-2019, coupled with its nimbleness and adaptability relative to the unique challenges in 2020 (including upcoming certification and training relative to industries that will be in need, such as healthcare) has meant that they are now sought after for advice by other agencies and entities concerning workforce needs and the allocation of training and recovery dollars. Most recently (and with CRED team members as mentors), Dodge County has reach 76% of stated goals to become certified as a Work Ready Community - utilizing the NCRC, embedding it in their high schools, partnering with United Way to help incentivize clients, and initiating CPPs, with CRED strategy as an exemplar.

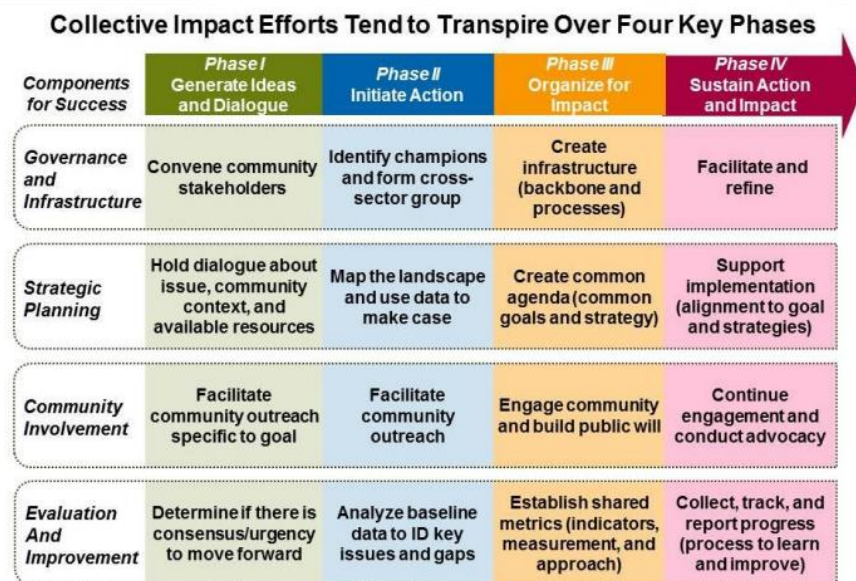
Collectively, the fact that the CRED strategy is being held up as the Gold Standard by many (coupled with its demonstrable malleability relative to diverse partners, industries, and environments) speaks well to the model's potential in garnering continued and sustainable collective impact across time and geographies. For a bulleted list of the CRED team's Big Wins in 2020, see Appendix A.

Brief Summary of 2021 Recommendations (based on 2020 Evaluation Data)

Recommendation 1: Continue Momentum Toward Sustainability and Impact (Phase IV) of Collective Impact Strategy

Collective Impact efforts tend to transpire over four key phases (Kania and Kramer 2011); to Generate Ideas and Dialogue (Phase I), to Initiate Action (Phase II), to Organize for Impact (Phase III), and finally, to Sustain Action and Impact (Phase IV). The four components for successful Collective Impact efforts (Governance and Infrastructure, Strategic Planning,

Community Involvement, and Evaluation and Improvement) each move through the four phases until, ideally, the Collective Impact Strategy is sustaining its momentum and engagement (see figure below).



Source: FSG.org

At the end of 2019, PRPG asserted that the CRED collective impact initiative was in either Phase III or IV for each component, with increased momentum among businesses and partners after the Work Ready Community designation. The CRED team furthered this momentum in 2020 with the successful growth and virtual optimization of the CPP, the allocation of CARES and other dollars for affected individuals. Their Best Practices model also worked as a springboard to strengthen collaborative communication and efforts with the Omaha Chamber, multiple non-profits, governmental agencies and businesses. We recommend that the CRED team continue to identify new potential partnerships, and to systematically identify shared goals among current partners/entities with an eye toward ways in which current short-term connections (which might have been born out of the needs of the pandemic and its ensuing challenges) might become more long-term collective efforts.

Recommendation 2: Build on existing networks/entities to provide broader outreach and access for Career Seekers

Prior to COVID-19, the CRED team received some feedback that HWS had the reputation of being the “unemployment office” in the community, meaning that the many services and programs available were not widely understood or known by community members. The team began to develop a relationship with the local library as a way to expand community awareness concerning HWS and the CRED team’s Career Placement Pipeline and other resources available to affected individuals. Given that individuals without access to wi-fi technology or who are generally in need of assistance in job-seeking often use their local library as a primary search location, this was an effective start.

Although this dialogue with libraries (necessarily) halted during the pandemic, relationships like these will be integral to build and maintain collective impact (through regularly reinforcing engagement and advocacy within a community, building goodwill). Further, one CRED team member noted that public libraries staff at least one person who has received training from the Department of Labor. We suggest that a CRED team member or informed HWS staff member make pointed (and regularly reinforced) contact with these and other durable and/or similarly trusted institutions (including churches, community centers, etc.) in and perhaps immediately surrounding the targeted zip codes. Not only will this help broaden the community’s understanding of HWS and the One Stop Workforce system, but it will also help solidify relationships among entities with shared goals without relying on or necessitating any additional CRED funding.

Recommendation 3: Return to Conversations Surrounding Re-entry

While this was an intended goal for 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic functionally disallowed further discussion specific to re-entry. As circumstances allow (likely in the fourth quarter of 2021), we recommend revisiting dialogue with a collaborative network of partners already dedicated to working with re-entry populations. If circumstances and staffing within the CRED team allow for earlier collaborative work in 2021, the virtual CPP might be a good entry point within prisons/detention centers for individuals who are nearing re-entry.

Recommendation 4: Continue to participate in collection software options

CRED's ultimate goal toward a One Stop Workforce system seems to now be garnering more support and resources in 2020 from the Chamber of Commerce, the governor and other invested entities, partly due to the increased awareness of disproportionately affected populations in the COVID-19 era. We believe that earlier discussions concerning a shared database/platform could do well to fully identify individuals' needs, while highlighting the various agencies that could help to meet those needs, substantially benefitting the community. This could be potentially developed through another entity (via another revenue stream), as the CRED team has been actively sought and involved in discussions of these efforts (including the Talent Initiative). We expect that the CRED team will offer valuable insights to any such efforts.

2021 Overview

A bulleted overview of these recommendations can be found in Appendix B. The recommendations utilized information from the findings of the interviews discussed above, in-house tools and materials developed by HWS and their partners, and meetings held with the CRED team leaders.

Appendix A

CRED Big Wins 2020

HWS (the backbone of CRED) was one of a few job centers in the U.S who remained open during the pandemic

- navigated barriers to service delivery
- configured spacing and distancing challenges

Worked with community agencies to address the needs of affected individuals with creative innovations for career seekers and businesses

- virtually optimized Career Placement Pipeline (CPP) program (while forecasting new programs in healthcare, IT and customer service)
- piloted virtual NCRC testing development (and proxy issues)
- virtual and drive-thru job fairs
- made information about job services and training available both virtually and on site
- virtual platforms (hosted for free) and drive thru career center events
- maximized HWS website (including new two-minute application process)
- improved timelines for connection to training, certification and employment
- Assisting community recovery efforts and career-seekers (via disaster relief, similar to Joplin, MO) through forthcoming (Feb 2021) Pharm-tech program (administering COVID shots and training/healthcare certifications)

Assisted career seekers struggling with decreased access to technology during pandemic

- better equipped the center with more technology/access for virtual interviews/Zooms
- pre-downloaded applications (Zoom, etc.) for more seamless job seeking and interviews
- provided Best Practices Zoom interview training
- disseminated flyers to the Urban League, MCC, HWS, and faith communities

CPP/Best Practices becoming known as the Gold Standard

- CARES dollars distribution influenced by CRED team's example (career coaching business engagement, training to employment)
- CRED leveraged people, resources, and employment with CARES dollars– dozens of newly approved training programs (over 3,548 students served, over 3,000 received ~85% funding (while the closest community college served 400 people)
- influenced how the training initiative was administered throughout the state (effort with 250 business partners, community colleges, unions, CRED, mayor's office)
- CRED team will also assist and help inform Chamber & Thrive/Talent Availability Initiative
- Using the CRED-developed strategy and mentorship, Dodge County has reached 76% of stated goals to become certified as a Work Ready Community
- Tyson implementing pilot program at ten plants (using noncredit CPP for mechanical engineering, embedded career skills coach, 2 programs for GED/ELL)

Appendix B

Overview of Recommendations

Continue Momentum Toward Sustainability and Impact (Phase IV) of Collective Impact Strategy

- continue to identify new potential partnerships, systematically identify shared goals among current partners/entities
- consider how current short-term connections (which might have been born out of the needs of the pandemic and its ensuing challenges) might become durable long-term collective efforts

Build on existing networks/entities to provide broader outreach and access for Career Seekers

- make pointed (and regularly reinforced) contact with libraries and other durable, similarly trusted public institutions (including churches, community centers, etc.) in and perhaps immediately surrounding the targeted zip codes.
- solidify relationships among public entities with existing positions/shared goals (and will require no additional CRED or other funding)

Return to Conversations Surrounding Re-entry

- (likely in the fourth quarter of 2021) revisiting dialogue with a collaborative network of partners already dedicated to working with re-entry populations.
- consider how the newly optimized CPP and other virtual resources might be useful with prisons/detention centers for individuals who are nearing re-entry

Continue to participate in collection software options

- consider how the urgent pandemic needs and the resulting solutions/platforms might help inform previous discussions of a shared database/platform to fully identify individuals' needs,
- such a platform can highlight the various agencies that could help meet those needs (including a CPP track for various industries)
- this long-held goal could be dovetailed with current efforts already undergoing, or in the early stages (within the Chamber, or the Talent Initiative)

Appendix C

Each CRED team member should reference communication networks/initiatives/programs that they have knowledge of in some capacity, including all those:

- 1) that are in idea form, or in the process of being implemented. (several virtual/pandemic responses would likely be included here).
- 2) that are implemented but in early stages (this would include all programs/initiatives that were implemented post our 2019 evaluation, so anything from January 2020-present).
- 3) that have continued running/operating - some might have been maintained as-is, others added to/tweaked over the past year (this likely includes business/industry relationships, processes for various certifications, etc.).

I. Explore four (4) key priority responses to workforce development in the COVID-19 Pandemic era:

- A. Serve **more** Career Seekers with employment resources and connections.
 1. What particular initiatives/programs are relevant here? Include all that you can think of; the evaluators can get a snapshot of relevant programs/initiatives in 2020 (those that are only beginning to form, those that are newly implemented, those that are well established) .
 2. Contact information for relevant individuals that evaluators should contact to discuss each of the identified programs/initiatives discussed in IA1
- B. Serve Career Seekers in a **virtually** optimized fashion.
 1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
 2. (Repeat the process from IA2)
- C. Improved timeliness; **faster**, more swift connection to employment opportunities.
 1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
 2. (Repeat the process from IA2)
- D. Increase and adjust the number of **places** that Career Seekers can be served with career opportunities.
 1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
 2. (Repeat the process from IA2)

II. How Unemployment Insurance Benefits process has affected workforce development:

- A. The impact of the Work Ready Communities Initiative and National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).
 1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
 2. (Repeat the process from IA2)

B. Examples of ACT Work Ready Communities & WorkKeys as part of disaster recovery like Joplin, MO following 2011 tornado.

1. How would you like to mirror the ways in which Joplin, MO responded? Has this process begun? Have there been any new information available on virtual proctoring?
2. (Repeat the process from IA1)
3. (Repeat the process from IA2)

III. A collective response to recovery efforts:

A. CARES Act community college opportunity and impact.

1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
2. (Repeat the process from IA2)

B. Chamber Thrive & Talent Availability/ Philadelphia Works study.

1. (Repeat the process from IA1)
2. (Repeat the process from IA2)

IV. Assess the impact of COVID-19 on employers and businesses engagement:

A. How should workforce system be more responsive to employer needs/ businesses still urgently hiring?

1. Which employers/businesses should we be speaking to (established, prospective)? What industries and/or potential areas do you identify as potential areas where workforce system has the opportunity to be more responsive?
2. Contact information for relevant individuals that evaluators should contact to discuss each of the businesses discussed in IVA1

B. How do we prioritize helping businesses find talent while remaining mindful of best-practices related to employee retention?

1. How has Workforce Development been responsive to pandemic needs?
2. What programs/initiatives are proposed, implemented, or in the process of being implemented?
3. Contact information for relevant individuals that evaluators should contact to discuss relative to the programs/initiatives listed in IVB1b

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