

Should Tennessee Create & Implement a Workforce Training Program Similar to Georgia Quick Start?

Tennessee Certified Economic Developer Capstone

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Workforce development is a key driver to the location of a new industrial company or the expansion of an existing industry. Companies very often have specialized training needs and tend to look for assistance with the training of their employees from educational institutions and/or state funded programs. While Tennessee's Economic and Community Development (TNECD) Department offers assistance to employers through its Fast Track Training Program, how does the State of Tennessee compare to other States who offer customized training programs, such as Georgia *Quick Start*?

The Southeast Industrial Development Association is a regional organization that provides economic development services throughout a 22-county region, across North Georgia, Southeast Tennessee and Southwestern North Carolina. In the organization's experience working across state lines, workforce development is the number one topic/concern for companies looking to locate or expand their business. A couple of questions being asked by these companies are, 1) How will we train our employees? and 2) What will it cost? These are very important questions and more than likely the deciding factor of where a company chooses to locate. Tennessee must remain competitive when compared to what other State's offer.

Having a skilled, trainable workforce is a top priority for new and expanding businesses across state lines. Most states have workforce development programs in place and/or work with their educational institutions to provide a workforce that is ready for employment. Sometimes, training programs are required that are unique to an employer and not necessarily available as part of a college's current curriculum. States such as Georgia, Louisiana, and

Tennessee offer customized training programs; however, the approach and cost of those programs differ.

Georgia's *Quick Start* program was originally part of the Department of Education and began as an uncertain training program in 1967. It has since become one of the state's primary economic development incentives for attracting companies interested in expanding or relocating to Georgia. In 1988, *Quick Start* became part of what is now known as the Technical College System of Georgia (TSCG) (New Georgia Encyclopedia). Former Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue said, "*Quick Start and the Technical College System of Georgia are two of the state's best assets for attracting new business to Georgia. Their commitment to a quality workforce makes a real difference*" (Georgia Resource Center). *Quick Start* and Georgia's technical colleges form partnerships with new as well as existing businesses to develop customized training programs for their employees. The process includes collaboration of *Quick Start* and client companies to analyze needs, design a training plan, develop modules and materials, implement training and evaluate effectiveness for continuous improvement. The program is versatile and start-up training is only the beginning. TSCG serves as the third partner in a company's *Quick Start* training plan to address ongoing workforce needs. Bruce Beasley, Vice President of Distribution for Bass Pro Shops stated, "*I expected Quick Start to be good trainers....I expected them to understand our business. But they were part of our business*" (Georgia Resource Center). Training is conducted in classrooms, mobile labs or onsite at the

company. *Quick Start* provides this customized training at no cost to qualified companies (Georgia Department of Economic Development).

Jeff Lynn, certified economic developer and International Economic Development Council (IEDC) member created the *Quick Start* program in Georgia and moved to Louisiana in 2008 where he created and directed Louisiana Economic Development (LED) *FastStart*. Just like Georgia's *Quick Start* program, Louisiana's *FastStart* also provides customized employee recruitment, screening, training development and training delivery for eligible, new or expanding companies – at no cost. LED *FastStart* uses a unique four-step process to create the customized programs.

- 1) Analyze - Every aspect of a company's proposed operation is analyzed;
- 2) Attract - *FastStart* works to attract the best potential talent by determining the competencies and behaviors that match the cultural and technical abilities that will help define the most successful employee;
- 3) Evaluate - Pre-hire evaluations using critical data that is collected for each applicant through behavioral interviews, job observations, situational role-playing, pre-employment training and hands-on simulations;
- 4) Train - Technical, team-based and soft-skills training programs are custom designed, sequenced and delivered to engage new employees (Louisiana Economic Development).

Quick Start has been ranked the nation's No. 1 workforce development program for years and *FastStart* has been ranked Louisiana's no. 1 workforce development program (Georgia Department of Economic Development and Louisiana Economic Development). *Quick Start* has received distinction all four times in the annual survey of site selection conducted and published by Area Development's magazine (Technical College System of Georgia). Jeff Lynn was hired in October 2016 to lead workforce training and economic development for the Alabama Community College System (Alabama News Center). It may be safe to say, that Alabama will be looking to offer this workforce program as well. With surrounding States creating and implementing this type of workforce training program, Tennessee may want to consider a similar program.

Tennessee is committed to providing a dedicated and skilled workforce and therefore offers the following unique workforce development programs:

- **Drive to 55** - the Drive to get 55 percent of Tennesseans equipped with a post-secondary degree or certificate by the year 2025.
- **Tennessee Promise** - Tennessee Promise is both a scholarship and mentoring program focused on increasing the number of students that attend college in the state by providing two years of community or technical college free of tuition and fees to graduating high school seniors.
- **Tennessee Reconnect** - Tennessee Reconnect programs are designed to help busy adults attain a college degree or certificate in order to be equipped, ready and successful in today's workforce.

- **Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP)** - Tennessee Labor Education Alignment Program (LEAP) ensures that post-secondary institutions are producing the skills and credentials that Tennessee employers need.
- **Workforce360°** - A systematic partnership among state agencies and the higher education system that delivers a highly skilled workforce for business.

Of course, there are other programs offered through the local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) such as:

- **On the Job Training (OJT)** - If an employer is willing to hire an individual who has no prior experience in a vacant position, an on-the-job training contract may be developed with the Local Workforce Development Area; whereby, the program can pay up to 50% of the trainee's wages during the specified training period.
- **Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)** - A competitive grant that provides funding to help eligible businesses effectively train and retain employees by providing skills upgrades and process improvement training for existing, full-time employees.
- **Apprenticeship Training Grant (ATG)** - Supports employers that are interested in starting an apprenticeship program or are already authorized providers of the Registered Apprenticeship Program through US/DOL-Office of Apprenticeships.

Tennessee's Economic and Community Development (TNECD) Department offers training assistance through its Fast Track Job Training Assistance Program. This program is a grant that

assists new or expanding companies with funding to support the training of net new full-time employees. To take advantage of this program, and other business incentives offered by TNECD, companies must first complete an Application for Incentives. Completion of this application provides TNECD with an overview of the company's plans for capital investment and job creation as well as their overall location needs, including any job training assistance. Grant funds are awarded based on the number of net new full-time positions created, amount of capital invested, wages of new employees and the types of skills and knowledge levels required. Tennessee Economic and Community Development works with the company as a resource in identifying potential training partners/institutions (Tennessee Economic and Community Development and Tennessee Department of Labor).

One of those partners is the College System of Tennessee also known as the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR). TBR designs custom employee training through its Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) and Community Colleges. New, job-specific training courses can be developed for companies at a local campus. The Industrial Training Department can develop training courses in a wide variety of industrial, high-tech, office and healthcare skills to serve major corporations, small businesses, industry, healthcare facilities, professional organizations and government agencies (The College System of Tennessee). Currently, the cost of this training is the responsibility of the company.

One difference in the customized training program offered by TSCG and the customized training offered by TBR, is that *Quick Start* works closely with a company to learn their needs

and then creates a training program from the ground up to meet the needs of that company. *Quick Start* provides a range of materials such as interactive, web-based technologies as well as video and multimedia production. Christian Hersacher, Oracal Director of Manufacturing Engineering and Production stated that, *“The company orientation video Quick Start developed for us helps provide consistent training and gets new hires up and running – all the training material they’ve produced is so high-end”* (Georgia Resource Center). Tennessee’s Colleges of Applied Technology and Community Colleges also work closely with a company to learn their needs; however, programs are typically designed based on current curriculum being offered and are not necessarily as innovative.

The way in which a company decides to train its employees and the cost may very well be the determining factor of where that company chooses to locate or expand its business. So, while customized training can be obtained in Tennessee as in Georgia, the cost of that training is where there is another difference. And in the world of economic development, the “bottom line” is what a site location decision comes down to. Most economic developers understand that minimizing risk for a company location is where a community or state can differentiate themselves. As mentioned above, Georgia’s *Quick Start* program is offered at no cost to companies who qualify. The cost of customized workforce training in Tennessee, although it can be reduced and/or covered by way of grant funds, is ultimately the responsibility of the company. Given the choice, one would think that a company would more than likely choose no-cost instead of low-cost.

At the end of the day, we know that there are other factors to be considered when a company is choosing a site location. However, workforce development is absolutely at the top of that list when comparing site locations among states. Tennessee is making great strides to provide a quality, skilled workforce not only for its existing businesses, but also for new businesses. The State continues to work to deliver qualified workers to companies by providing workforce development opportunities such as the Drive to 55, Tennessee Promise and Tennessee Reconnect Programs as mentioned above. The Fast Track Job Training Assistance Program is Tennessee's way of assisting with a company's specific training needs. Through this program, Tennessee awards grant funds to a company to be used for the specific training of identified jobs. This Program allows the company to choose a training opportunity of their choice such as those offered by Tennessee's Colleges of Applied Technology and Community Colleges, and then reimburses the company for a portion of or all those expenditures. Georgia's *Quick Start* approach is unique in that the program is provided at no cost by the Technical College System of Georgia where they help assess workers, train new employees on the company's unique processes and develop customized job-specific training using the most current techniques and media. If Tennessee were to offer the same or similar workforce training opportunities such as Georgia *Quick Start*, in addition to its current programs, it may prove the State just as competitive (if not more so) when companies are considering the best place to locate or expand their business.

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