



The Ohio Business Resource Network (OBRN) project director, Matt Falter, participated in the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grantee meeting/conference that was held at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) headquarters in Washington, D.C. on November 16-17, 2015. Matt had the opportunity to serve as a subject matter expert and engage in peer-learning with Round 2 and 3 grantees, as well as discuss the OBRN project with several key DOL administrators.

The OBRN was selected by the Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) Technical Assistance Team and the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to serve on several panel discussions during the grantee meeting

Matt participated in the breakout session titled, “Engaging Employers to Support Innovation”, where a panel of Round 1 grantees shared their experiences and lessons learned for both developing initial employer relationships, as well as for effectively engaging employers to support innovation and improvement in the workforce system. The session was facilitated by Patricia Maguire, Technical Assistance Coach, Jobs for the Future. Also participating on the panel were Mike Baker, Manager of Strategic Planning & Innovation, Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity and Eric Karmecy, Project Manager, West Central Job Partnership, New Castle, Pa. Matt and the panelists shared best practices around employer engagement and how to build and maintain effective employer partnerships. Matt also provided the 30+ attendees an overview of the BRN history and model, success stories and was able to elaborate on the innovative employer engagement model of having staff serve as the single point of contact for all business services that are available in the region. Early feedback from DOL administration was that this was the highest-rated breakout session of the entire conference!



*Mike Baker, Illinois Dept. of Commerce, Patricia Maguire, Jobs for the Future, Eric Karmecy, West Central Job Partnership and Matt Falter, OBRN*

Matt also participated in the afternoon plenary session on Day 1 titled, "Evidence and Innovation: Evaluation in the Workforce Innovation Fund and Beyond". The panel included OBRN's third-party evaluator, Public Policy Associates (PPA), based in Lansing, Michigan. David McConnell, Senior Research Associate represented PPA and also participating in the discussion were CareerSource, North Central Florida, IMPAQ International, along with Demetra Nightingale, Chief Evaluation Officer, DOL. The plenary was moderated by Jacob Klerman from Abt Associates.

During the session, Matt and David took part in a panel discussion where they described the role evaluation has played in planning, implementing, and learning from the initiative. They discussed how the close working relationship between PPA and project leaders has been integral throughout the evaluation, from developing the logic model and theory of change to working together to access state wage record data.

"Good communications, both formal and informal, are crucial at every stage of the evaluation to make sure that clients and evaluators are on the same page so that clients can act on and benefit from the research," Mr. McConnell said.

Being accessible and discussing findings as they arise has facilitated knowledge-building and adjustments to improve the project, such as better tracking of data that will be helpful for sustaining and replicating the project in workforce areas that need a new way to support both businesses facing challenges and those that plan to grow.

"I think of our evaluator as part of the project team," Matt said. "We have regular meetings to discuss activities, and rather than waiting for evaluation findings to come in a final report PPA is able to provide us ongoing feedback that we can use to make improvements when they are needed."