



KNOWING THE PLAYING FIELD

"*We're dealing with real people in real time.*" That's how Mike Curran, Executive Director of the North Valley (NOVA) Job Training Consortium, describes his organization's approach to workforce development. Central to its mission to connect people and jobs, NOVA's labor market intelligence pipeline creates a conduit for authentic, relevant workforce information. And while it serves displaced workers, youth and homeless veterans, NOVA identified and targets special populations as illustrated in its recent effort to aid displaced engineers in acquiring essential advanced expertise.

NOVA, the brainchild of the City of Sunnyvale and the product of the NOVA Workforce Board, serves Silicon Valley's high-tech "Innovation Corridor," specifically the California lowlands cradling the seven-city network of Sunnyvale, Cupertino, Los Altos, Mountain View, Palo Alto, Milpitas, and Santa Clara. As a regional syndicate, NOVA's approach to employment and workforce training emulates the disposition of this distinctive domain.

INTUITING: THE NATURE OF INNOVATION

The sense of containment portrayed by the region's natural environs – as the South Bay basin is bounded by the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range - belies the volatility of its workforce dynamic. The character of the Innovation Corridor revolves around rapid technological change. In a perpetual cycle of creative destruction, new opportunities emerge as innovation reigns – rendering transitory technology obsolete and whole segments of a trained workforce jobless. In 2000, at the peak of the state's boom and bust economy, one million Californians worked in high-wage, high-tech positions. By 2003, as many as half of those jobs remained with some be filled by other workers. Reallocation of about half of the workforce occurred to non-tech industry including business services, health care and education, and more than twenty percent of former high-tech workers have since landed in lower paying jobs.

As part of its core competencies, NOVA's mission entails helping youth and adults acquire the dexterity to position themselves within a changing labor market. Considering the relentless stream of displaced job seekers, workforce intermediaries must possess a deep understanding of the regional climate and have access to information to help decipher its temperamental disposition.

CONVENING: LABOR MARKET "INTELLIGENCE"

Via its *Workforce Publications* program, NOVA procures labor market intelligence in real time by capturing a "snapshot of what's happening in our backyard today and why it's important." While labor market statistics and other quantitative analyses supply valuable information, NOVA seeks history and context. As other agencies provide industry demographics, NOVA hones in on gaps that might translate into opportunities, asking, "Is there information out there that we just don't know about?"

"Jane Goodall lived with the chimpanzees... we go out and live with the industry for a while."

Mike Curran, Executive Director

Recognizing the uncommon character of the region, NOVA seeks to understand customer requirements and industry idiosyncrasies within their environment. Like an anthropologist in the field, NOVA infiltrates the economic culture of the region to discover what's important to the people living and working in Silicon Valley, and why.

NOVA's staff works closely with other workforce investment boards, including San Mateo County WIB and Work 2 Future in San Jose, to cultivate industry connections and investigate pertinent issues. NOVA's Board – representing regional organizations like the Silicon Valley Leadership Group and the California Employment Development Department, as well as companies on the frontline of regional industry including NASA's Ames Research Center, Intuit and Solectron – consults on important issues. Informed by regional representatives and industry insiders, NOVA reports feature topics of special regional relevance, as they highlight trends and provide in-depth information to illuminate Silicon Valley workforce dynamics.

Silicon Valley Roots: Foundational Occupations with Growth Potential, a special report released by NOVA in 2006, examined Silicon Valley's "other" rewarding occupations and outlined what it takes to enter and succeed in "foundational" jobs. NOVA researchers interviewed employers and workers in 28 occupations in Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties that offer good growth and wage potential. Illustrating NOVA's anthropological approach, the report provides a contextual perspective on jobs that are at the "roots" of the region's economic infrastructure. NOVA presented the study's results and ramifications at the California Workforce Association Spring Conference in 2007.

Launching each study, NOVA assembles a special panel of diverse expertise, often including members of partner workforce investment boards, regional business executives, local economic development delegates, and Chamber of Commerce representatives. And with each report's release, NOVA sponsors forums where job seekers, industry representatives, educators, and other interested parties convene to consider the study's impact and implications.

NETWORKING: INFORMATION PIPELINE

NOVA also circulates an e-mail newsletter, *Workforce Innovations*, which encapsulates workforce development issues, trends and resources, and features a monthly review of labor market statistics. NOVA channels its special studies, industry reports, and

newsletters through a network of intermediaries, generating a labor market intelligence "pipeline." Over seven hundred affiliations represent all forty-nine California Workforce Boards, industry representatives, small business owners, members of Congress, local career centers, public libraries, area high schools, community and four-year colleges, as well as other public and private organizations. Comprised of many links and diverse associations, NOVA's labor market intelligence network acts as a conduit for robust regional workforce information.

NOVA's challenge lies in assessing the impact of this innovative initiative in information dissemination. While the reports make their way into college classrooms and local business boardrooms, NOVA derives considerable benefit from the process itself. For example, the ninety-three companies profiled in *Silicon Valley: A Small Business Perspective* represent ninety-three new links between local companies and job seekers, via NOVA and its role as workforce intermediary. Meanwhile, as a result of NOVA's directed study, area business owners obtained essential expertise in capitalizing on the services a workforce investment board has to offer. Says Project Manager Jeanette Langdell, "*We were able to increase awareness of workforce development by talking to these small businesses, because a lot of them had no idea what workforce boards were. They learned about what we could do, and what we could help them with ...and they learned about other resources that could help them.*"

Industries illuminated under NOVA's spotlight include healthcare, bioscience, high-tech manufacturing, and telecommunications. With a scarcity of financial resources, NOVA relies upon Rapid Response Special Project competitive grant funding, in addition to other Workforce Investment Act funds, to support continued studies.

Strategically partnered with the California Employment Development Department, NOVA co sponsors CONNECT!, a comprehensive self-help center where job seekers

Looking ahead, NOVA may next shed light upon the solar industry. Affiliated with several burgeoning solar businesses and coalitions, NOVA supports the goal of creating a "solar center of excellence in Silicon Valley." Meanwhile, NOVA is working closely with Miasolé, an up and coming solar startup with an innovative design for solar cells, to locate, train, and employ as many as three hundred job seekers.

may access labor market information via its resource library, and procure One-Stop employment services. With NOVA's goal of propelling people to the forefront of the innovation pipeline, CONNECT! acts as the clearinghouse, referring job seekers to more than thirty associate organizations involved in an array of training, educational, and placement programs.

BROKERING: SPECIALTY SERVICES

In 2003, NOVA at the invitation of the California Space Authority, joined in a large space industry career opportunity assessment. This resulted in the NOVA industry report *One Giant Leap: Launching an IT Career in the Space Industry* caught the attention of the California Space Authority (CSA). Recognizing that as many as one-third of aerospace and defense contractors' employees are nearing retirement – a forecast for a critical

shortage of workers – CSA enlisted NOVA's expertise in conducting labor market research to examine the prospect of transitioning information technology workers to aerospace-related information technology specialists.

Long-time partners in workforce training, NOVA often joins forces with UC Santa Cruz Extension to design training programs that prepare job seekers to succeed in emerging high-tech fields, and equip incumbent workers with new expertise to adapt to industry advances. UC Santa Cruz Extension works quickly to devise coursework and when an opportunity for software engineers in the aerospace industry emerged, NOVA availed their services once again. Working together with Silicon Valley aerospace and defense companies, including Lockheed Martin and Loral, and with the federal support of the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative, a pilot training program coalesced.

Launched in April, 2007, the *Certificate Program for Software Development for Aerospace and Defense Applications* comprises a four-month curriculum fashioned for seasoned workers, particularly from the high-tech sector. The specialized coursework merges workers' skills and experience with transitional training. With another class warming up, twenty-eight students will emerge with new expertise to fill high-wage positions in the aerospace industry. NOVA will track their progress in this burgeoning field, with prospects of continuing the program. Additionally, NOVA hopes to supplement upcoming coursework with industry internships to bolster the link between skilled workers, high-tech training, and high-quality jobs.

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