



OAKLAND
COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

1999 M-TECH Center Charter Member
Focus Group Report

Source: OCC Office of Institutional Research

Focus Group Report: M-TECH CHARTER MEMBERS

DESCRIPTION

This focus group was conducted in order to gather the opinions of Charter Members of the Oakland Community College M-TECH Center. On Tuesday, June 29 eleven participants were present at the focus group session held in well-appointed conference room at the Oakland Community College Pontiac Center. Overall, the discussion focused on what services are most appealing to businesses whose focus is IT, or who have a large IT contingency. The discussion centered on their level of participation in the M-TECH Center, and their ideas for additional services not already developed by the program coordinators. Particular attention was paid to what type of services and fees should be associated with Regular Members of the M-TECH Center, when compared to Charter Members.

WHO ATTENDED

<u>Name</u>	<u>Company</u>
1) Marie Slominski	Chrysler
2) Larry Healy	EDS
3) Robert Wrask	IBM
4) David Hay	Kelly Services
5) Theresa Dolbert	Kelly Services
6) Delores Kaschalk	KPMG Consulting
7) Jeff Kaczmarek	Oakland County
8) Judy Eaton	Oakland County
9) Sharon Edwards	Oakland County
10) Mike Grennier	National Tech Team
11) Christine Dobrovich	National Tech Team

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The group indicated that they were pleased with the array of services that are going to be offered at the M-TECH Center. They

felt overall that Regular Members would also be very happy with the services provided. The group did not offer much guidance in the way of attaching a tangible value to these services for Regular Members. Participants were most pleased with the opportunity to hire well-trained employees who have completed courses or a program at M-TECH. The Charter Members expressed the importance of regular member involvement in the overall direction of the M-TECH Center, as well a desire to clearly delineate the services for both Charter and Regular Members.

The following section highlights the specific discussions that occurred for each of the questions posed during the focus group session. An overall summary of comments is presented as well as a sampling of quotes which enlighten the results.

QUESTIONS

1. *First, I am going to ask you to give your thoughts on the distinctions between CHARTER MEMBERS and REGULAR MEMBERS of M-TECH.*
 - * A majority of those who attended liked the fact that they were the charter members and seemed to think that benefits for it would be a positive to them and their company.
 - * Several people brought up the fact that there needed to be a process in place to establish the divide between charter and regular member. What level of involvement would there be between regular and charter members? Cheryl explained the conditions of the grant and the dissemination of it - as well as whether they are legally bound to invite charter members and the character of the invitations.
 - * It was suggested that on the M-TECH Committee there should be a representative from the regular members as well.
 - * As to the main distinctions they see, a majority of charter members provide monetary and temporal contributions to M-TECH. They also felt that it would be good for charter members to have a larger role in curriculum development.

a. Do you think the differences are appropriate?

- Almost all of the members agreed that they enjoy the potential benefits.
- Several people thought it was necessary to make it clear about whose in and whose out as a charter member.
- Membership Status should be linked to resources (\$ and time, and involvement)

Quote Sampling:

`I just want to be sure that there is a chance for regular members to be involved in the Center. I don't want it to be the same people guiding the goings-on.'

`I think the services are terrific. For either a charter or regular member.'

b. Do you think any changes should be made?

- A majority of the participants think no changes are in order at least initially. They want to get the center operational before looking to change the membership structure.
- A few people mentioned to be sure to have a regular member representative on the committee to share information/progress.
- One person wanted to establish clear guidelines as to terms of serving on decision-making committees.

Quote Sampling:

`I'd like to see how things progress, but all the plans look good to me. I like the fact that we'll be involved in shaping what is offered - in terms of content.'

`Let's make sure that there are specifics in terms of having rotating positions for regular members on the advisory committee.'

2. Now I'd like to ask you about the worth of the services we propose to offer to out regular members.

a. How valuable to you think each of these services are for a REGULAR MEMBER of M-TECH?

- All of the group agreed that the services were valuable for a regular member, many of them were similar to the ones offered to the charter members with some differences.
- All like the opportunity to have access to qualified people for employment purposes and to have a hand in the curriculum process. All saw this as a benefit - for both member types - regular and for charter members.
- Nearly all liked the testing aspect for assessing their employees skills. They thought regular members would like that as well.
- Nearly all also thought that regular member input into the curriculum process would be a good feature. They agreed it was a terrific feature of the M-TECH experience. Liked the responsiveness of the process. Meeting business needs through direct involvement.

Quote Sampling:

'I like the fact that we can have assessment of the skills of current employees as well. That gives us a good start on knowing what needs to be done in terms of future training.'

'I love the idea of having access to a pool of trained people for to hire. I think everyone would.'

'It is very valuable to have this cooperation between those doing the training and the companies that will do the hiring.'

b. What would you consider a reasonable cost for a REGULAR MEMBER to be charged for a membership to M-TECH services? This Membership would include the following:

- The group had trouble putting a monetary value on this. The Automation Alley representative gave the concrete example of what they did there for a fee schedule.
- - It is on a sliding scale based on the number of employees that are in a given company. He mentioned that there is a need to be sure not to price anyone out - and make the fee too restrictive for smaller/newer companies.
- A majority of the participants seemed to like this idea.
- One representative mentioned that they would like to see what competitors charged for similar services. But, most of the group agreed that there was not a clear entity that performed similar functions/ had similar goals.

Quote Sampling:

'At Automation Alley, we have fees based on the size of the company. That seemed the only fair way to that. We didn't want to price anyone out of the chance to join.'

'It is vital that we include these upstart companies. I mean, some of the biggest companies in five years may not even exist now. We need their input.'

3. *We would also like your input concerning any additional services you think would be valuable to our REGULAR MEMBERS.*

Can you think of any additional services you believe would be of interest?

- * Want a lot of mentoring opportunities for the students and their businesses. Looking to establish a good level of contact for each person. This would be a good way to acquaint people with how the real world job situation is. For both regular and charter members.

- * One member suggested site visits to each charter member to better get people involved.
- * About half of the people wanted the center to be open 24/7 so that people could always have a place to go to work on things and have access to programs and equipment.
- * A majority of the group also felt it was a great idea to include a variety of distance learning approaches in the M-TECH curriculum. Suggestions included: On-line course delivery, course e-mail/web rings, review and homework materials on-line.
- * A few people mentioned that they would also like to see a plan where people at M-TECH could utilize other OCC facilities including childcare and gym services.
- * A few people would like to have a separate assessment center for skills testing.
- * A few people mentioned the need for a well-rounded approach to instruction and topics. So in addition to the technology-based courses, there be a "total" employee that comes out of the M-TECH center.
- * One participant suggested that an evaluation competent of the center be included as a regular feature. People could have information about placement rates, skill levels, and what type of students are enrolled there.
- * One person suggested that M-TECH partner with companies that have a specific piece of software or system that employers need training on. That way their people and M-TECH can coordinate the necessary training.

Quote Sampling:

I would like to see a program where students would visit a variety of work sites. Nothing is better than actually seeing the work environment to prepare students and get

them to expect what will happen.'

`Communication and workplace skills should be emphasized as well. We need well-rounded people ready to do the job. It is not all technical knowledge alone.'

4. What were you expecting to get out of the M-TECH partnership when you committed to it?

* Most agreed that the primary thing they said they wanted to get out of it was a pool of specially trained people to perform high tech jobs at their companies. Both in terms of new recruits and keeping their current staff up-to-date.

* Most agreed it best for a flexible approach to training with a good amount of involvement with charter and regular members.

Quote Sampling:

`I see this as a great chance to grow our own talent in this county. Business and educators working together to make that happen.'

`Gaining access to a unique basket of skills to better prepare workers and help companies find qualified people.'

5. What would you like to see the center to accomplish in the next year? In the next five years?

Next Year

* Some mentioned to help train people for the 21st century.

* Some mentioned to keep their current employees current.

* Some mentioned that building a good relationship so

that employer needs are met by the training.

Five Years

- * Nearly all mentioned to provide a good source of employees.
- * Some mentioned to help to cultivate talent that exists right here in Michigan/Oakland County.
- * Some mentioned to expand the workforce in the area in the tech area.

6. In what specific ways would you like to see the M-TECH Center improve the skills of your employees?

- * A few mentioned that high level of skills - work on a variety of applications, ability to receive training in any area that can come up.
- * A few mentioned skills-based assessment. They don't wish to have someone certified because she/he sat in a classroom for X amount of hours - instead, to look at how well people can perform the basic tasks associated with a given application.

7. Can you think of any other IT Companies (Or Companies with a Large IT Contingency) that would be interested in membership in the M-TECH Center as a Charter or a Regular Member?

- * Many expressed that there were already a lot of people involved at the Charter level and that they did not want to share. but many at the end agreed to forward a list.
- * One person mentioned that it will be important to look at companies of various sizes, because the smaller companies of today represent the big successes of a few years from now.