



Indiana Office of Technology

Powering a State that Works

Title: SEAL – Building A Work-Based Learning Program & Hiring the Next Generation of State Employees

Category: State CIO Office Special Recognition

State: Indiana

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Project Initiation Date: 2019

Project End Date: Ongoing

Executive Summary

In Fall 2019, the Indiana Office of Technology (IOT) started the process of removing degree requirements from most job descriptions and built a non-traditional pathway program to leverage the new hiring approach. Amidst COVID, and the need to gain more qualified candidates, Indiana became one of the first states (if not the first <https://statescoop.com/indiana-state-earn-learn-workforce-office-technology-seal-program/>) - and one of the first local IT employers to employ a skills-first approach for technical roles.

As part of its skills-first effort, IOT partnered with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development to leverage an existing, trade-focused apprenticeship program (State Earn and Learn, or SEAL) into a pilot for using work-based learning with on-the-job paid training to support the mission of a public agency. Using this collaboration, IOT's SEAL IT program emerged. While SEAL IT reskills a diverse population of adult citizens from various occupations into public-sector IT professionals, the program provides personnel support and talent development in mission-critical operational and cybersecurity business areas.

Through SEAL IT and its skills-based focus on hiring, the Indiana Office of Technology has demonstrated its willingness to take bold, innovative steps in public-sector IT hiring and talent development practices, and the agency has earned kudos from leaders in the broader Indiana IT community for its efforts. During 2019-20, IOT brought industry data and collaborative partners to the attention of Indiana's State Personnel Department in order to promote and act on the concept of hiring talented citizens on the basis of their skills in IT – documented through experience, initiative, and certifications over unpredictable and restrictive degree-only hiring.

Project Narrative

Idea

With a need to develop more talent in state government and skills-based hiring being a priority of Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, the Indiana Office of Technology (IOT) became one of the first states and one of the first local IT employers to employ a skills-first approach for technical roles.

As part of its skills-first effort, IOT partnered with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to leverage an existing, trade-focused apprenticeship program (State Earn and Learn, or SEAL) into a pilot for using work-based learning with on-the-job paid training to support the mission of a public agency. Using this collaboration, IOT's SEAL IT program emerged. While SEAL IT reskills a diverse population of adult citizens from various occupations into public-sector IT professionals, the program provides personnel support and talent development in mission-critical operational and cybersecurity business areas.

Implementation

The SEAL program uses a work-based learning approach to give individuals entry-level experience in different IT business areas while providing paid study opportunities to achieve industry-valued certifications.

IOT partners with a local IT vendor to identify basic skills and attributes that match with entry-level job opportunities in the agency. The vendor then manages the talent-pipeline process to vet potential candidates for IOT to interview for these opportunities, and IOT's Director of Strategic Workforce Planning and its hiring managers play direct, close roles in the interview and selection process. Following the hiring experience, an associate onboards with the IOT team targeted for their potential end-assignment as a state employee.

In March 2020, IOT successfully onboarded two SEAL IT associates in a temp-to-hire contract capacity, then graduated both individuals into full-performance State staff positions between February-May 2021. This start date was a blessing and a curse, as it tested the program immediately. The two SEALs started their first day in the office, the next day state employees were asked to work remotely. IOT's SEAL IT pilot met its goals in spite of the pandemic and the necessary requirements of a virtual work experience.

Building on this experience, IOT onboarded its next two associates in July 2021; over the course of the next eleven months, based on associate success and tremendous demand for growth, IOT brought in another thirty associates that, as of June 2022, support eleven business areas and a variety of skillsets across the agency.

Timeline of an IT SEAL

Phase One (first 0-3 months)

Employees receive:

- A solid technical foundation to deliver value within an IOT operational team, documented through achievement of CompTIA A+.
- Mentorship and coaching on service successfully in an office environment.
- The fundamental understanding of how to navigate State agencies, policies, procedures and IT Service Management.
- Upon completion of these milestones, associates will be eligible for an hourly wage increase.

Phase Two (9-12 months)

Employees receive;

- An experience carefully balanced between the EARN (hands-on experience within a functional team) and the LEARN (continued study toward meaningful certifications).
- Deeper understanding of agency and business unit goals and objectives.
- The skills needed to provide assistance for administration or development activities.
- Development of basic abilities to uncover business objectives and expected outcomes for support activities.

During phase two, employees will achieve certifications that will support the mission of IT operational units while strengthening the employees' skill development. In this phase, IOT tailors the curriculum to match both needs, including - but not limited to - certification in Network+, Security +, and Microsoft solutions delivery. Upon completion of all milestones, associates will be eligible to enter a State of Indiana staff position.

Impact

Since its inception, this program has hired individuals with occupations such as warehouse workers, truck drivers, line cooks, grocery employees, and veterans – now into IT business areas of high need, like cybersecurity and cloud operations. (Figure 1)

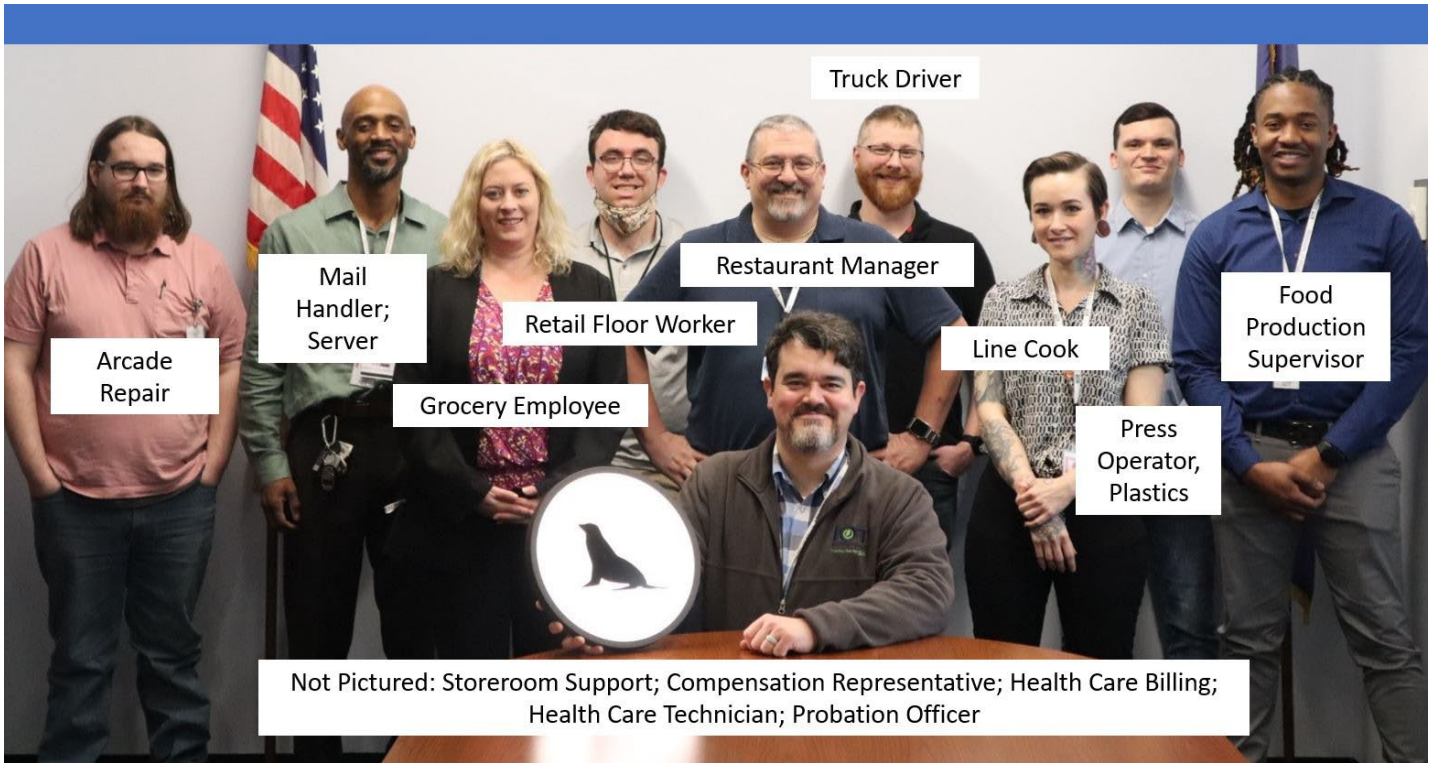


Figure 1

To date, IOT uses SEAL IT to support: Security Operations, including penetration testing, cybersecurity ELKStack, enterprise resiliency, security as a service, and a forthcoming security operations center; Cloud Operations; Customer Service; Unified Communications (Telecommunications); Operational Security & Solution Delivery; Project Success Center (Project Management); Identity & Access Management; and Chief Administrative Officer services, including business analytics, technical writing, and strategic workforce support. (Figure 2)



Figure 2

After onboarding with her/his/their team, a SEAL associate begins an enriched learning program that focuses on professional networking and collaboration; how to work in an office setting in a government organization; IT certifications tailored to the associate's background and the business needs of her/his/their team and tradecraft; and hands-on experience with the projects, process, and ticket queues associated with customer service managed by the team.

During their experience in SEAL IT, associates earn industry-valued certifications while training hands-on and alongside IOT professionals over the course of a standard workweek. While IOT manages each associate's development in balance with the mission needs of the business area, associates typically spend more time in the LEARN (certification and professional-development study) phase of the program during their first three months. Over the course of the next nine months, associates are assimilated gradually into the EARN (work-based learning and hands-on tradecraft) phase, gaining valuable experience that mirrors an entry-grade staff employee.

Throughout the experience, associates continue to have allocated time and learning opportunities that facilitate certification success. As they take on responsibilities reflecting entry-level experience at IOT, associates receive paid-study opportunities built upon a successful preparation curriculum model that is tailored to each certification.

To date, depending on their assigned teams, SEAL IT associates have earned CompTIA's A+, Network+, Security+, and Project+ certifications, as well as the Microsoft Azure Fundamentals certification.

In 2021, based on a robust talent pipeline and considerable demand for talent across the organization, IOT continued to add another 30 associates into a variety of business areas. As of June 2022, IOT has hired a total of thirty-seven individuals into the program. Two individuals voluntarily separated, meaning that IOT has an overall 94.6 retention rate in this program.

The SEAL Program has allowed IOT to find and train, exactly as needed, the next generation of its workforce. In July 2022, IOT anticipates hitting its target milestone of converting five associates into staff roles, with the remainder planned for conversion between August 2022-July 2023.