



The Grand Forks Job Service Office was transformed by the “flood of the century.” The need to respond quickly to serve our business and applicant customers required us to look at new ways to get the job done. Job Service stood open and ready to help out wherever we could. The flood experience has improved our relationships and built lasting partnerships with workforce service providers on both sides of the river. Everyone worked together to respond to whatever challenge presented itself as we recognized that services provided by our agency were critical and an essential element to the successful recovery of the community and the economy.

Steps taken by our agency and staff to meet the employment needs of the community were as follows:

- The evacuation of Grand Forks meant the closing of nearly all Grand Forks businesses, which represented over 34,000 wage and salary jobs. Job Service processed over 12,000 unemployment insurance claims the first 2 weeks after the evacuation, ensuring workers could have funds to meet basic needs and to help keep their connection to their employer and community.
- Job Service ensured that people who were receiving unemployment benefits met the intent of the law, and those who were able and available for work returned to work as quickly as possible to support the recovery of the area’s economy.
- To prevent unscrupulous contractors from moving into the area and taking advantage of a vulnerable community, a one-stop contractor certification center was established and housed at the Job Service office. This partnership with the State Attorney General’s office, Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Secretary of State’s office, ND National Guard and the city Contractor Licensing office was open for business starting on Sunday April 27, 1997.
- To provide for workers in the critical shortage areas, the process of allowing non-U.S. citizens to work in this country was expedited to one week. The Alien Labor Certification process usually requires at least six to twelve weeks for processing.
- Innovative approaches were found to bring employers and workers together:
  - Job Fairs focusing on construction, manufacturing/production, and sales and service, were held evenings at the Job Service office, providing an opportunity for workers and employers to meet. The job fairs were wildly successful and continue to this day.
  - A quick and easy work application was developed and published in North Dakota and border states daily newspapers and on the Internet.
  - Three consumer hotlines were established; the Commuter Express Hotline was used by members of the workforce to assess the transportation needs of the area, the Work Force Hotline was marketed statewide to individuals seeking work in Grand Forks, and the Contractor Hotline was developed for home/apartment owners to connect with contractors available to provide services. All of the hotlines were housed and staffed by Job Service personnel.
  - Lists of employers seeking workers were distributed to job seekers, and lists of available workers were provided to employers with names categorized by type of work sought and contact information.
- Recovery from a flood disaster of the magnitude of the one in Grand Forks requires extraordinary efforts. Job Service Rapid Response services provided disaster assistance in the form of over seven million dollars in a National Disaster Assistance Program Grant and the Grand Forks Youth Disaster Marshall Plan. These programs put over 800 displaced workers and youth to work in our community in clean-up and restoration activities in public buildings, parks, and schools. Many youth worked in the emergency child care center, which allowed workers to get back on the job sooner and to begin the process of cleaning and restoring their homes and businesses.

In spite of their own personal situations and being flood victims themselves, the staff of the Grand Forks Job Service recognized the criticality of the service they provide to the community and responded exceptionally well in re-opening the office so quickly after the city was evacuated. You never know where you will be when disaster strikes or necessarily what you will be called on to do. The cooperation between Job Service offices in North Dakota

and Minnesota and the partnerships developed with the many federal, state and local agencies were tremendous. This cooperation helped groups to focus on getting the important things done first, and did not let the concern for policy and procedure delay getting the services where they were needed. This focus continues to serve the Grand Forks region well today.