



# Microsoft® Office Specialist

Helps Adults Gain Meaningful Employment

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Success Story



## OPPORTUNITY JUNCTION

**Location:**

Antioch, California

**Program enrollment:**

60

**Success Metrics:**

- Proof of employment-ready skills
- Evidence of independent problem-solving abilities
- Value-added program enhancer



## CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CENTER LEVERAGES MICROSOFT OFFICE SPECIALIST CERTIFICATION TO HELP LOW-INCOME ADULTS LEARN MARKETABLE SKILLS

### CHALLENGE

Like many other suburban areas across the United States, Contra Costa County in California is suffering from the economic recession. With a 10.8 percent unemployment rate in 2010, the competition to fill administrative job openings is extremely high according to Brianna Burkman,

manager of fundraising and special projects at Opportunity Junction.

Through their Job Training and Placement Program, Opportunity Junction helps nearly 60 participants each year enter the workforce with better paying jobs to support themselves and their families. According to Burkman, the challenge is figuring out how to make program participants—many of whom have little work experience, employment gaps and other barriers—more marketable to hiring managers.

“We are trying to figure out how to get our candidates’ résumés to first and foremost stand out, so they can be interviewed,” she said. “We thought the Microsoft Office Specialist certification might be one way to make their résumés shine above the rest.”

### SOLUTION

MOS certification offers a clear way for employers to separate job candidates who claim they have Microsoft Office skills from those who in fact possess an advanced working knowledge of the applications.

“Everybody says they are proficient in Microsoft Office,” said Burkman. “But one person’s ‘proficient’ is another person’s ‘basic.’ Having the MOS certification is evidence of a well-rounded set of skills.”

With funding from sponsors like Chevron and the Y&H Soda Foundation, Burkman opted to integrate MOS certification directly into Opportunity Junction’s Job Training and Placement Program.

Burkman also offers praise for Certiport’s practice exam tool for MOS, Certiprep™, asserting that the addition of the self-study portion of the program has helped increased participant’s ability and willingness to tackle problems using the computer—a departure from previous years.

Following three months of intensive training on Microsoft Office and other essential job skills, program participants perform a four month internship for Opportunity Junction. Now, they

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*"Because Opportunity Junction became a Certiport Authorized Testing Center, I've been able to take steps forward in completing my personal and career goals."*

– **Shaunette Buchanan, Opportunity Junction program participant**

spend a portion of the internship working independently with the Certiprep test preparation software to hone their Microsoft Office skills. Then, participants receive pay raises for every MOS certification they earn while performing the internship.

"They are much more willing to take risks and figure things out," she said. "They are learning on their own, which encourages them to solve problems in front of the computer."

## RESULTS

Although the MOS program has only been in place for nine months, many program participants are learning that their certifications have great value beyond just temporary incentives.

Calorence Rivers, an administrative assistant and bookkeeper who earned the Microsoft Office Specialist Word 2003 and Excel 2003 certifications through Opportunity Junction, said her supervisor was "delighted" and "relieved" to find someone he felt would be able to contribute right away.

"My MOS certifications make me a more credible employee because they show that I am concerned about my future, proficient in my work-related abilities and confident in myself," said Rivers.

Program participant Shaunette Buchanan has earned 10 MOS certifications through the Opportunity Junction program. She believes her certifications will help her stand out to prospective employers when she enters the workforce.

"With the MOS certifications, I can show that I am an expert in some fields, and that I have the required knowledge to train others," said Buchanan. "Ultimately, the certifications allow me to further prepare myself for opportunities and advancement within any company."

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