

STEARNS AND BENTON EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT



Both the Stearns County and Benton County have considered the possibility of replacing the agency that has been helping give employment services to the area for the past twenty years. Both of these counties have been in contract with the Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council for the past two decades, ever since 1993. At some point during the week, county commissioners for the Stearns County will make a suggestion for a contract to be made with an entirely different agency, according to The St. Cloud Times. The new agency would still provide the necessary employment services for those who are part of the program that takes people from welfare to working. This particular program is referred to as the Minnesota Family Investment Program. Through this program, those who participate have to be actively seeking employment or they should already be employed. A counselor works with the individuals to ensure that they can work, even if they have children or are not sure how to transport to and from work. Over the past few years, the Stearns-Benton Employment & Training Council has managed to see a major decline in the amount of funding it receives. With the lack of funding, county officials for both Stearns and Benton have been considering whether or not a different organization would be able to provide the necessary employment services in a more efficient manner. The contract with the SBETC will be coming to an end as the New Year approaches, and so now would be a good time to create the new contract with a different agency. Mark Sizer, the human services director, has said, "It was a difficult decision to make to move forward with the process. As we got into it, we realized that like with all government and quasi-government agencies, we're at a period of time where it's just prudent to do a review like this and take a fresh look to see if there are efficiencies and cost benefits that can be gained." Just last year, the counties developed a committee that would come together to discuss the options on contracting with a different agency to see what else was out there. At the beginning of this year, the counties started to request ideas from different agencies that would be willing to offer such services. Reviewing the proposals would ultimately help the county committee to make a decision as to which agency would best fit the position. Sizer believes that the county should stay in a contract with SBETC for the next few months, and then ultimately choose a new agency for the position.