



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, December 15, 2010

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Fred Carberry, Michael Munday, Kevin Page, Atty. Robert Leblanc, Juan Yopez

Members Absent: Ron Contrado, Joseph J. Bevilacqua

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Odanis Hernandez, Ruth Marrero, Deborah Andrews, Susan Almono

Guests Present: Barbara Zeimetz, Lisa Coy, Dave Souza

I. Approval of Minutes of November 17, 2010

A quorum being present, Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. Peter then called for a motion on the minutes of the November 17, 2010 meeting.

Juan Yopez made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 17, 2010 meeting as submitted with Mike Munday seconding the motion. Fred Carberry and Bob LeBlanc abstained and motion passed.

II. High Performing WIB – Draft Budget to Utilize Incentive Grant Resources

Rafael Abislaiman reported that the budget is still being developed for the High Performing WIB grant. Ralph said that at a previous meeting we mentioned having a half day conference and perhaps having Don Gillis from the state WIB Association come and speak about WIBs. Bob LeBlanc said that we need to be thinking out of the box and develop a strategic action plan with another facilitator.

Ralph said that nothing is definite and that we could have a half or full day conference. Our HPWIB focused on three things – manufacturing, health care and 'Green-ness'. We also indicated our desire to get involved in life sciences and expanded our youth eligibility to serve folks that might be better able to use and benefit from our training and services.

There are a lot of things on our plate and we can go in a lot of different directions and the dollars won't last long. The Career Center wants \$25,000 and may put it to good use but it would be wise for the WIB to consider other uses for that money.

Ralph said that a little less than \$1M is going to training out of an overall budget of \$10M of which \$2 1/2M is for state employees. He made it clear that Trade training occurs off our books. Trade is state funded by the State and the Career Center has to do case management for Trade so that should be factored into in our overall budget planning. Nevertheless, substantial funds are going to case management and career center functions vs. training. Chili will be getting exact numbers for this region's participation in Trade.

Bob LeBlanc said that the money is to make us more effective and not to provide for the deficit. We need a meeting of the WIB to discuss becoming more effective and facilitate and find ways and means to provide employers with the incentive to hire employees. He said that we will become more effective if we engage those employers with the highest probability of increasing employment. We need to find out the barriers and help them.

Ralph said that those were excellent points. At yesterday's conference he learned of a recent study on career center operations at Metro South which Don Gillis participated in. The question is how persuasive we can be in lobbying state government that might still be invested in traditional, pre-recession practices.

Bob said that while we have private sector on the WIB and actually employers sitting on the Planning Committee we should convene an action conference with key decision makers in the Valley to discuss barriers they face and introduce what we can do to help companies. Bob then said that outside factors affect us internally.

Peter Matthews then said that Mike Munday mentioned getting machinists. Mike said they had done a survey and held a meeting. They need people today, lathe people. They are losing their base through attrition. Ralph suggested advertising in the Spanish newspapers as there may be people with the skills needed from Spanish speaking countries. We may need a vehicle for training such as a video for non-English speakers.

Bob LeBlanc said that there are a number of facets to the problem. The vocational schools are not addressing the problem and he suggested bringing in the superintendents to see how we can solve this. It seems crazy that with this high unemployment rate, we are not able to train. Mike Munday said that the schools have antiquated equipment and CNC equipment is very expensive. Kids are not attracted to machine shops when other programs have state of the art equipment. In the past, GE would feed the jobs and now that we are in a ten year cycle parents tell their kids not to get into this field. Peter Matthews suggested having retirees come back to train but Mike said that training is a long process on expensive equipment and some retirees have issues that preclude them from doing this. The equipment may also be put at risk.

Barbara Zeimetz said that with the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund we were almost there. There was a lot of momentum. The schools didn't have the money to buy the equipment and the second thing was trying to reach out to younger people and we were looking to develop some marketing tools and then the economy fell apart. It is all about the money in this industry and we need to get people to start to focus on these kinds of jobs and not just academics.

Questions on software were raised and Mike Munday said that there are several different kinds of software used and the machines are manipulated by computer.

Kevin Page asked how the High Performing WIB money can add value in the private sector. We need a mission with values and goals on how to spend the \$100,000 to meet those goals. The way to get employers here is to add value and let them see what is in it for them. We need to decide how to market to the Merrimack Valley and get the word out. Industry and grants change and one thing that Raytheon is now focusing on supporting in the schools is STEM in addition to their other endeavors.

Mike Munday spoke about how Mike Corcoran from the Workforce Training Fund came to his manufacturer's meeting and how those employers didn't know about it. He also said that state provides a \$2,000 credit if you hire a veteran.

Kevin asked what our mission is and Ralph said that its workforce development. We need to look at equipment and training that help re-invigorate interest in the high paying jobs that are open. But Ralph said that focusing on manufacturing requires tradeoffs. Last year 30 or 40 machinist jobs were filled whereas 300-400 health care jobs were filled. Health care is 20% of the national economy and there are a lot more job openings there. He also said that most health care jobs were entry level while manufacturing often requires more advanced training.

Barbara Zeimetz said that health care and manufacturing are both part of the High Performing WIB proposal and Mike Munday said that 50% of manufacturers have gone out of state but the infrastructure is still there. Bob LeBlanc said that decisions on funding for vocational schools can be made locally. Ralph also mentioned that prospective changes in the defense budget may affect manufacturing.

Fred Carberry said that is a good idea because of the continuing decline there has been a disinvestment in the training sector. He has heard federal and state officials said that manufacturing has gone and is not coming back. He said that the Merrimack Valley has always been a manufacturing stronghold. We are missing it, the vocational schools are missing it and, kids and parents and we are losing our independence. Other jobs are spawned through manufacturing and dollars are spread across the suppliers. Mike Munday then told of how the Chinese company come to us for quality technical jobs for their domestic market while they sell less quality goods to the United States.

Motion by Bob Leblanc seconded by Mike Munday to pursue various methods in support of training for the long and short term support of manufacturing. Motion passed.

Kevin Page said he can bring a group together to put the goal together and bring the vision down to an actionable plan with three or four of the best ideas the group can come up with. The goals set forth can be looked for action and implementation next year.

III. Overview of Youth RFP

Ralph Abislaiman said that the Youth RFP is still a work in progress. We hear about STEM from the state and federal governments but schools aren't producing enough of students who can do the work without remediation. We want to include youth who require less remediation and who will more quickly pay tax payers back by themselves becoming taxpayers who can in turn help other kids.

The Youth Council agrees but it still wants to keep funding at 70% OSY and 30% ISY. With ARRA funding we have already fulfilled our OSY obligation and have spent 80% of funding on OSY. There is \$104,000 for group training for ISY but there is still hesitancy to commit the money to that.

We are trying to change the way of thinking among kids and are looking to do an after school program with a connection to summer jobs. The unemployment rate for Hispanic and black youth 16-24 is 90% in some instances. We are trying to give them a leg up by renewing a focus on education as the best way out of poverty.

Lisa Coy, Youth Director at ValleyWorks Career Center, said that summer eligibility is different than WIA with the only overlapping criteria being a child of a single parent. Discussion followed on the criteria and the additional eligibility criteria the Youth Council recommended and the Planning Committee voted on and approved. Lisa said that the Summer Youth money uses is more specific than WIA and that there's no mechanism to amend the criteria. Barbara Zeimetz said that summer youth money is for the poor and that the additional eligibility criteria may be part of that.

Bob LeBlanc wondered how we can get kids to value education and opportunities to rise out of the bad situations they've been placed in if all we can do is waste money on entitlements. Peter said that our intent in adding eligibility criteria was to expand our ability to reach poor kids who can effectively use our training money.

A discussion followed on the fact that changing the Summer Youth eligibility may have to go to the legislature. Barbara said to change eligibility for the summer program requires legislative change. Bob LeBlanc said that the governor and some legislators would support that. The Planning Committee directed the Executive Director to prepare a letter for signature at the general board meeting in January so that we can suggest that this particular state law be changed. Peter Matthews said that this would by no means disallow youth but broaden eligibility to serve a larger pool of participants.

Motion by Bob Leblanc seconded by Mike Munday to authorize Ralph Abislaiman to prepare a letter for signature requesting legislative change to the summer eligibility criteria. Motion passed.

IV. Update on SESP Grant

Ralph said that the SESP Grant is a collaborative project with North Shore, Lowell and our WIBs. There is pressure to spend this money which is for incumbent and new workers. It is easier to fund incumbent workers rather than getting companies to commit to new hires. Joe Bevilacqua has been working with NEXAMP with a one half million dollar energy assistance grant for 25 companies in the region and we have partnered with them to facilitate employer recruitment.

Lead and asbestos abatement also qualify under the program so we put out an invitation to bid for incumbent worker training and got two unresponsive bids the first time. We put out another RFP and received two bids that are both excellent.

Up to \$50,000 in funds tentatively made available and the bids came in at about \$35,000. Both are for incumbent worker training at Lawrence Training School with employer agreements from four or five lead and asbestos abatement companies. He said that he would like to create another RFP for new worker training. OSHA guidelines are part of all the training cycles and jobs pay around \$30 per hour. The incumbent training will provide new or renewed certifications and increase pay by at least \$1 per hour. There is a guaranteed for hire for at least a month with the commitment from the hiring employer. Reputable companies involved include Aulson in Methuen and G&M who receives public contracts.

Fred Carberry mentioned that the Saunders School renovation and other like it stipulate that the 30% of the employees should reside in Lawrence. Contractors say that they have difficulty filling those positions. He stated that lead and asbestos abatement training for projects like this may help local people get hired.

Motion by Bob LeBlanc seconded by Fred Carberry to authorize staff to proceed with negotiating the contract for incumbent workers and proceed with a new RFP for new lead and asbestos abatement workers. Motion passed.

V. Individual Training Account Activity Update

Odanis Hernandez reported that the Youth ITA account has been exhausted and there are two waiting for additional funding. There is still money in the adult ITA and Dislocated Worker accounts.

Ruth Marrero said that she hasn't monitored too many ITA programs to date but has responded to a few issues and gone to the vendor. The ITAs are spread everywhere. Juan Yopez wondered what the issues were and Ruth said there was an issue at one site where a teacher had left and the student complained that the new teacher was not up to standard. Ruth said that she was going to follow-up tomorrow and if she was not

satisfied offer technical assistance and corrective action. If that doesn't work then she said we would stop referrals. Fred wondered about job placement rates and Ruth said that she had no information on the ITAs but the group trainings are doing a good job and on track with one exception. She also said that she is working with the Career Center on referrals. Ralph said that statewide the ITA system needs better oversight. ITAs are individual placements and we find out employment outcomes when we get reports from DOR.

Fred Carberry said that since he signs off on contracts he noticed a couple for hair design in the amount of \$12,000 and wondered if that is money well spent. Odanis said that part of her review is performance and we also rely on MOSES information. We start talks with the vendor and regularly track job placement. This vendor's performance in 2010 is good and Odanis goes back a couple of years reviewing performance data. The Career Center also does labor market research.

Fred said that we raised ITA level of funding to \$15,000 with the intent clients would obtain certification or licensure to support a family. Odanis said that when she reviews an ITA she looks at performance in MOSES data base and she would not approve a vendor with poor performance. Now that we are monitoring ITAs we will be meeting with vendors. Ruth opined that hair design/cosmetology is a very marketable profession and that one client has a potential hire upon completion. She said this is a good license to obtain.

VI. Update on Group Training Programs including de-obligating a youth EMT contract

Odanis distributed a handout with contracts data by WIB category. She reported on the OSY Youth Programs noting that the EMT program never got off the ground but that we still have a relationship with the vendor who also an ITA vendor who gets referrals.

Ralph Abislaiman said that there were a few issues with recruitment and marketing for the training which has been mentioned a couple of times. The EMT is a specialized training and there were issues with driver's licenses, clean driving records and the need for a GED which LARE was willing to train for made recruitment difficult. We also had adults being recruited for the Adult EMT training and three youth moved over to the adult program for the first cycle and looks the same for the second cycle which starts in January. Staff recommends moving \$60,000 to youth ITA's. We have spoken with LARE who have up to 10 of 12 being placed from their medical assisting program. There is another proposal from Commonwealth Corporation for assemblers. We have had a conversation with LARE and if that falls through they would like to consider another medical assisting program. Peter Matthews said he noticed the Clean Edison was deobligated. Odanis said that was voted on at the June meeting.

Discussion then followed on marketing and why a program could not be filled in this economy. Lisa Coy said that the Career Center is open to marketing and works with LARE. They contacted the local high school guidance offices and now have a facebook page as a new way to reach youth. She talked about youth understanding that an EMT

is a first responder and many were reluctant to pursue that. There was a partnership with ambulance companies to hire then after completion of the program. After all is said and done the program just couldn't be filled and rather than turn back money it is recommended to deobligate the program and transfer the funds to the Youth ITA account.

Motion by Mike Munday seconded by Kevin Page to de-obligate up to \$58,000 from the Youth EMT program with LARE. Motion passed.

Motion by Mike Munday seconded by Fred Carberry to transfer the remaining funds from the Youth EMT program to youth ITAs. Motion passed.

VII. Ex-Offender Strategic Plan and Lessons Learned

Ralph Abislaiman said that the recommendation in the Ex-Offender Strategic Plan is for an employment agency to work with ex-offenders to assist with job placement. Ralph said that there may be a possibility of state or federal funding to support this. The group also spoke about a public/private partnership. This was proposed by the Farm. Ralph said that he was seeking preliminary approval to go forward with a proposal if there is state or federal funding.

Bob LeBlanc asked if the report was finished and Ralph said that it will be complete by the end of the month and that he had a draft which he didn't release while awaiting the final document.

Motion by Bob Leblanc seconded by Fred Carberry to table the Ex-Offender Strategic Plan until the report is finalized. Motion passed.

VIII. Other Business

Ralph spoke about marketing and connecting with a soup kitchen or food pantry. He also mentioned advertising the Spanish bi-weekly and monthly newspapers. Bob LeBlanc said that he likes the idea of exploring outreach and the needs of people and suggested meeting with Fr. Paul O'Brien from Cor Unum.

Ralph raised the question of authorizing a small amount of money such as \$10,000 to subcontract with a couple of vendors. Bob said talk to Fr. O'Brien first and Kevin said we need to identify our target market and see what we can do for the \$10,000. Fred Carberry also suggested a brochure to distribute at these locations. Lisa Coy said that we currently have an individual doing outreach with flyers/brochures, etc. and can add these places to the distribution list. Susan Almono suggested looking into the Spanish radio stations. David Souza said that he has been on one radio program and done a spot in Spanish.

Peter Matthews said that we should come up with a specific plan and then put the money to it.

IX. Adjourn

Having no further business Fred Carberry made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Kevin Page. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Recorder