



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

8:30 a.m.

**Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843**

- Members Present:** Peter Matthews, Charles LoPiano, Mike Lynch (via speakerphone)
- Members Absent:** Pedro Arce, Shirley Callan, Sal Lupoli, Robert LeBlanc, Karen Sawyer, Mike Sweeney
- Staff Present:** Betty Kirk, Deborah Andrews
- Guests Present:** Barbara Zeimetz, Amy Weatherbee, Arthur Chilingirian

I. Update on High Performing WIB

Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 8:43 a.m. and said that we would proceed with the items that don't require a vote until later in the meeting when Mike Lynch will be available by telephone. He then called on Barbara Zeimetz to give the update on the High Performing WIB.

Barbara Zeimetz said that the meeting packets contain the comments from the state on our submission for high performing WIB certification which we received the end of July. We have been waiting for templates suggested we use in performance. Our submission contained a number of goals, objectives and benchmarks. They felt that there were too many benchmarks and were concerned with board involvement in the process and that it was too dense a report.

They asked that we go back to the key indicators for the board which explains progress. We want to know what they want for a document and not go back and forth. Barbara said that she spoke with Ruth Stolberg yesterday on another matter and she asked where we are at with the revisions. Barbara said that she replied that Ruth should forward what they are looking for as soon as possible. She assured her that we will be having a meeting with the board and go through the process. We will document the board engaging in the discussion on benchmarks and get them down to four or five.

Barbara also said that they were concerns with the operation of the board itself such as selection reflecting the goals of the strategic plan and the board CQI process.

Betty Kirk said that we have been looking at an orientation process for some time. We need to work on engaging board members and getting the board to reflect the region's demographics. Betty also said that we held High Performing WIB Advisory Board meetings.

Barbara Zeimetz said that the HPW advisory board consisted of a majority of board members but the perception on their part is that the board is not engaged. She cannot explain why they feel that way. She said that she would like them to provide exactly what they want – something very specific and then she can bring it to the board meeting for a dashboard report.

Another item they asked about was a revenue plan but there was not clear instruction. They wanted to know what we will be looking for money for and where we are going to get it. We will get the material, fill in the blanks, and send it back. Barbara did say that the next submission date for those who have not applied is October 16th with only one WIB going to submit at this time.

Amy wondered what the ramifications would be if they don't submit? Barbara said that they have not indicated anything. She said that WIA reauthorization looks like it may be happening and may include significant changes. She said that since ARRA people in the field are buried with work and we just want to get this done after coming so far.

II. Update on 501©3 Status

Betty Kirk said that Fred Carberry, who is at another meeting, asked her to report that what we are waiting for is an update on the financial statements to get this in.

Amy said that Tracy had originally prepared the information but that information is dated and needs to be brought up to date.

III. Dedicated Fund for Workplace Education RFP

Betty Kirk said that this item was on the agenda to talk about for Shirley Callan in particular, as it is a workplace education RFP to train incumbent workers in ABE/ESOL. Betty said that she sent this to all the ABE providers and a number of employers in the region. She noted that she has already had a response from Key Polymer. Betty also said this was sent to several nursing homes. The release date is September 30th and Betty said that we tried to get this out and make everyone aware.

Chili said that this RFP is issued by Commonwealth Corporation and said that WIBs were excluded and he feels that it is important they are included. Discussion followed on push back on this issue and Deborah Andrews noted that there is a request for comments and that is an opportunity to express the fact that WIBs should be included.

Barbara Zeimetz asked what happened with the Construction RFQ.

Betty said that this has been extended to October 9th at Fred Carberry's request. A meeting was convened with Chili, Amy, WIB staff, representatives of the Greater Lawrence Regional High School and labor. The issue is that we need to get private employers to commit to hire. We want to put clients in construction training but need the employer commitment. Betty did say that Jackson Lumber has said they may be willing to commit.

Peter Matthews said, as a private employer, he cannot guarantee a job. He said that he would state that he would do his best and review all appropriate candidates from a pool of candidates.

Betty also mentioned that she had a call from Andrew Mente who expressed interest and asked to be invited to the next meeting. He suggested putting it out there and seeing what happens.

Peter Matthews said that all financial institutions that carry federal insurance are receiving special assessments this year and this is going to continue for seven years.

Discussion followed on the guidelines and the fact that it is possible that some innovative program design does not always translate to practical implementation.

IV. Approval of Minutes of August 19, 2009

With Mike Lynch available by telephone, Peter Matthews asked for a motion on the minutes of the August 19, 2009 meeting.

Motion by Chick LoPiano to approve the August 19, 2009 minutes as submitted seconded by Mike Lynch. Motion passed.

V. Review of Potential ARRA Funded RFPs

Betty Kirk said that there were productive meetings between DGA, ValleyWorks and the WIB on the RFPs to be released. Employer feedback was researched and Barbara Zeimetz has prepared a summary for the options for soliciting training dollars. We have come up with three models for consideration.

Barbara then said that there are a number of potential scenarios for utilizing the funding for training for Adult and Dislocated Workers through the ARRA allocation. Barbara then went over the three models.

The first model is for a **Customized Training RFP** - This specialized type of procurement provides opportunity for a company or group of companies to obtain training designed to meet the special requirements of an employer or group of employers. It requires a commitment by the employer to hire trainees upon successful completion of the training program; and a matching cash or in kind payment by the employer that pays for not less than 50% of the cost of training.

The MVWIB is requesting and will assist the state in applying for a waiver of the 50% match which would reduce the match to 10% for companies employing less than 50 and up to a maximum of 25% for all other employers. So far 21 States have applied for and received a similar waiver and we anticipate approval of at a minimum a significant reduction in the matching amount.

The Program Design Considerations to be determined: Should we develop a rolling RFP (accept applications on a quarterly or other basis until funding exhausted? Require a minimum number of enrollments? (minimum of 5 enrollments?) Peter Matthews wondered if we were limiting participation by insisting on a minimum of 5 enrollments. He cited a situation where an employer may only have 4 and would not be eligible. It was agreed that language could be included that said more information is required if there are less than 5 enrollments.

Areas of discussion were whether to target WIB major/growth sectors; should a specific amount of funding be set aside for this activity, and if yes how much for how long? It was agreed to allow for flexibility in moving money but that the Planning Committee needs to be kept informed.

The advantages of this type of program are: Employers will interview candidates prior to enrollment in training; requires employer commitment to hire successful graduates; increases connection of employers to local workforce system; provides actual jobs for participants; and requires investment by employers in program design and support of training.

The disadvantages are: Generally not utilized by employers; requires employers to find appropriate training providers; could tie up funds and not be utilized; and proposals could be rejected or inappropriate causing negative perception from employers.

The second model is for a **Group Training RFP**. This type of procurement allows for the development of a training program designed to engage multiple

participants in **occupational skills training** in a specific job or jobs. Group training can incorporate a number of sequential activities which lead to employment in a particular area. Group training was discontinued for adults and dislocated workers nine years ago when the Workforce Investment Act replaced the Job Training Partnership Act.

Program Design Considerations to be determined are, because ITA's are utilized for the majority of training for adults and dislocated workers, that this RFP should promote and reward creativity for the development of training options in new areas. Historically programs were targeted for a broad cross section of the eligible population which likely reduced training options due to the enrollment of eligible individuals with a wide range of educational and occupational skills. Through this RFP Proposers will be encouraged to design programs that provide training for individuals possessing varying levels of education, occupational skills and previous work experience.

Programs funded through this initiative will allow proposers to identify target groups (adults, dislocated workers, women, older youth) and entrance requirements for the proposed training

Barbara said that ABE/GED/ESOL/training specific educational remediation may be incorporated within the program but will not be required. Job Readiness preparation may be included in the program design but will not be required.

The programs will ensure the attainment of national and/or industry recognized skill or educational credentials obtained as a result of the occupational skill training activity. Proposers must demonstrate active involvement of employers in the design and operation of the program. Extra points awarded for proposals that include employer commitment to interview successful completers. Targeted industries and occupations identified as part of the MVWIB Strategic Planning process and employer meetings and surveys will be given priority (through bonus points?) for consideration for funding. RFP's will include a list of these industries and job titles. Training designs can be flexible and sequential as long as it makes sense. Prospective bidders will be provided with information on the characteristics of the eligible population seen at the Career Center.

Considerations are: · Should there be a minimum enrollment level and should there be a maximum cost per level or no cap? Amy Weatherbee said that current ITAs are capped at \$15,000 which is high.

Also, should there be a maximum duration length of the program; should existing ITA programs be allowed to bid in the group training category? Barbara said that this is TBD. Amy said that could be an opportunity for new vendors.

Barbara continued stating that the Advantages and Disadvantages of this type of program are: Providing an option for the development of group programs allows

a vendor to take a risk in creating something new. It allows a certain level of financial support for program activities that is not guaranteed through the ITA process. Subsequently, group programs generally provide some economies of scale in terms of training costs. The ARRA dollars provide an opportunity to take some risks and incentivize some creative program development in targeted sectors and occupations.

The disadvantage is that there is no guarantee of success or placement of individuals in training related positions. The response may be disappointing or limited as it has been in other regions.

It is likely that additional effort in the provision of technical assistance and a commitment of staff working with selected vendors to identify appropriate trainees will be required.

The third model is for a **Pilot Project - Job Readiness and Transition to Work Project** – Based on conversations with employers, the results of the employer surveys, and the demographics of the job seeker population at this time we are proposing to implement a short term (maximum 6 week participation) job readiness and transition pilot for 15 to 20 individuals during the late afternoon and early evening at the Career Center. The project will be funded through ARRA training dollars and operate 3 or 4 days per week.

This new program intervention will be designed for individuals possessing at least a high school diploma and some previous work experience who need short term skill remediation or computer training to obtain employment. Employers in our most recent focus group identified two primary issues that were the most common factors in deciding whether or not to hire an individual. They were the lack of appropriate job readiness skills (attitude, work ethic, understanding of the job), and the lack of basic computer skills

Surprisingly most of the employers in the focus group and in surveys feel that they can teach the specific job duties related to their industry as long as the individual possesses these attributes.

This pilot project will: Provide the opportunity for individuals to obtain a Microsoft Certification of Digital Literacy which consists of five self paced courses: Computer Basics, The Internet and World Wide Web, Productivity Programs, Computer Security and Privacy, and Digital Lifestyles. Each course has an e-learning module and an assessment. The Certificate Test which covers all five courses provides a Microsoft Digital Literacy Certificate. The entire course takes approximately 20 hours. The Certification Test approximately 1 hour.

There are Job Readiness Workshops utilizing the successful curriculum already in place in many of the Career Center programs and workshops, Career Counseling and Job Search assistance, connection to OJT for further training with employer

following placement, ability to test utilization of online training at other institutions under the oversight of Career Center staff, access to specific short term educational remediation, and skill acquisition necessary to obtain employment.

Participation would have a maximum duration of 6 weeks for all participants to ensure intensity of services and integrity and validity of model.

Barbara said that the final model is for the **Youth RFP(s)**. As the Planning Committee is aware, there is a significant pool of funding for the population (approximately \$500,000) between carry in from FY09 and new dollars for FY10. The staff of the MVWIB, Career Center and DGA, as well as the WIB Consultant, are working to develop a new model or models to incorporate within the RFP for these funds. Currently we are researching program models across the country for possible replication or reinterpretation for use in our region.

This concluded Barbara's report on the proposed RFP models for ARRA funding.

Peter Matthews called for a motion on the ARRA funding for RFPs with the understanding that this is a work in progress.

Motion by Chick LoPiano to utilize the ARRA funding for RFPs as presented and discussed seconded by Mike Lynch. Motion passed.

VIII Adjourn

Having no further business Chick LoPiano made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Mike Lynch. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Recorder