



YOUTH COUNCIL

MINUTES

Wednesday, September 8, 2010

11:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

439 South Union Street

Lawrence, MA 01840

Youth Council MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kristine Blum, Irene Chalek, Lisa Coy, Melanie Mericle, Steve Noroian, Linda Piergeorge, Megan Shea, Cal Williams

MVWIB Youth Council MEMBERS ABSENT:

Howard Allen, Janet Allison, Tom Casey, Beverly DeSalvo, Ed Fitzgerald, Howard Flagler, Tricia Snow, Heidi Riccio, Barbara Richards, Michael Strem, Vinnie Ouellette, Ed Warnshuis

MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:

Ralph Abislaiman, Mary Kivell, Deborah Andrews, Odanis Hernandez

GUESTS PRESENT:

Dan Bush, Arthur Chilingirian, Sam Martin

I. Call to Order and Introductions

A quorum being present, Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m. Introductions were made around the table.

II. Approval of June 9, 2010 Minutes

Cal then called for a motion on the minutes of the June 9, 2010 meeting.

Motion by Megan Shea seconded by Linda Piergeroge to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2010 Youth Council meeting as submitted.

Motion passed.

Ralph Abislaiman then said that he would like to apologize to the Youth Council for the procedural confusion surrounding second year funding of LARE's FY 09-10 OSY programs. The programs that had not been recommended by the Youth

Council and should never have been brought to the Planning Committee. We will do everything possible to prevent that from happening again.

CAL stated that Ralph has explained that the MWIB planning cannot both recommend and approve a WIA Youth funding allocation. The Youth Council recommends and the board's Planning Committee approves, disapproves or modifies recommended budget allocations.

Deborah said that the Youth Council made a recommendation not to fund two programs for a second year funding due to underperformance. The Planning Committee then voted to fund two programs. A compromise was reached through the Mayor's office because the process was irregular.

Cal Williams said that the Youth Council is a subcommittee of the Workforce Investment Board and is federally mandated through WIA. Megan Shea wondered if the role of the Youth Council has changed and Sam Martin of Commonwealth Corporation said that there was some discussion on WIA reauthorization regarding whether the Youth Council would remain mandatory but that has not changed to date.

Ralph Abislaiman stated that when a decision is made not to fund a vendor program, there is usually a grievance procedure. In the future, another board entity may hear a grievance concerning a Youth Council decision not to recommend a program. But, in order to be successful, a grievance would need to prove that the Youth Council had been arbitrary and capricious in not recommending refunding. That could not have been proven in the recent case.

Cal said that he has served on the board since 1999 and that there was a prior time when a contract was not refunded due to underperformance. He is pleased that everything is now in place and is looking forward to moving on.

III. WIA Statues relating to Youth Council Responsibilities with the WIA fund allocation process

Cal Williams then referred to an insert in the meeting packets that defines the role of the Youth Council and advised members who may have questions to feel free to contact Ralph or Deborah.

IV. OSY Education and Medical Assisting Program

Deborah Andrews explained that the OSY Education and Medical Assisting Program is being funded for a second year and the question is whether to fund the program for 8 or 12 slots. She explained that LARE has found training related jobs for 8 out of the 12 original enrollees in the first year program. There is a large spectrum of jobs under medical assisting. She referenced a grid of the job placements with wages. The goal of the contract was to job-place 9

out of 12 youth or 75% and that 8 of those placements would be training related placements. LARE successfully accomplished the certificate training component.

Originally we thought the reason for the poor performance was that there were few jobs for youth in the training related field. The Council needs to decide whether to recommend an increase to first year funding levels now that LARE has reached 67% of the overall employment goal and 100% of the training related goal. That is to say whether we should fund 12 rather than 8 slots and whether the budget should be about \$67,000 or about \$52, 500.

Lisa Coy said that she proposes funding for just 8 because the Youth Council voted not to fund and the fact that even with an extension LARE is still at 67%. She would recommend going with the 8 and seeing how they do.

The cost is \$52,000 for 8 and \$67,000 for 12. Megan Shea questioned the unit rate cost. Chili said that the cap has been increased for ITAs and the cost of training has gone up.

Lisa said that she has 2 candidates in the pipeline who have gone through the entire process of counseling, testing and eligibility. She said that 7 other people have expressed interest.

There was discussion on the ability to depend on the viability of some placements, as the length of employment for some of the jobs had not yet reached 90 days, or end of the probation period. Chili also noted that the problem with youth medical assisting is that youth lack of related work experience and employers look for that. Megan Shea asked about monitoring job placement numbers prior to the end of the program. Deborah said that when Odanis monitored the program she identified the need for another job developer, which LARE has put into place going forward.

Odanis said that there is a new MVWIB Performance and Monitoring Manager who was unable to be here today. She has already had the opportunity to monitor one of the Out-of-School Youth programs. Irene Chalek wondered if the primary concern is vendor performance or if the field doesn't support this number of jobs. Deborah said that we have tried to address both those concerns by making contract adjustments.

Motion by Megan Shea to maintain second year funding for the OSY Education and Medical Assisting Program at 8 slots. Linda Piergeorge seconded the motion and the motion passed.

V. Eligibility Barriers

Ralph Abislaiman said that WIB youth customers need to be both poor and meet at least one additional barrier to qualify for training. He stated that the current barriers severely limit who we can help. He went over the WIA Title 1 Statutory

Youth Eligibility Requirements and existing MVWIB Local Barriers listed in a handout. Ralph said that it is difficult to recruit kids stuck in a cycle of non- or under-achievement but that we should always try to help improve their lives when they decide to change. In order to help other kids who are poor but better able to help themselves, he recommended that three additional local barriers be added. They are youth living in 1.) Youth Living in a Designated Census Tract Poverty Area; 2.) Youth living in a non-traditional household; 3.) Youth Living in Public Housing. The intent is to expand the number of youth that we may serve. The additional barriers are not intended to exclude but to include more youth.

Deborah said that we will also have more access to vendors, as we have received complaints that current eligibility standards are too stringent and the eligible youth too difficult to serve.

Sam Martin said that he would like to comment that there is no issue with the actual barriers but the intention of creaming young people and getting the best and brightest is contrary to WIA. Federal and State government are very clear that we must serve the most difficult to serve. We must not push them out to where only miniscule services are available. He said that the local board can operate beyond WIA regulations with other funding resources.

Ralph said that we are working on getting our 501©3 certification to access additional funds. Megan Shea said that that students need to test at grade 7 or 8 to get into programs and that eliminates 70% of our youth. There was discussion on grade levels and Sam said that there are currently no WIA programs serving low literacy, employment aged youth.

Ralph Abislaiman stated that we don't want to operate outside of statutory guidelines, but wondered if our role is education or workforce development and training. He noted that a 20-student high school classroom currently gets the same amount of money as all of our youth targeted employment and training funds put together. We are stuck in educational remediation and that is a disservice to better performing economically disadvantaged youth. We need help to help them get jobs in an economy where there's likely to be long term unemployment. We need to help them learn to contribute back to the national economy.

The City of Lawrence has a 95% minority population in its public school system and most of them come from economically disadvantaged or poor families. We target well below the middle of the pack. The vast majority of job training and other funds are going to the most underachieving third. Ralph wondered what money is helping the middle third of at-risk kids to move up and not down.

Sam said that it goes against the intent of the legislation. The service strategy is individualized and the ability to benefit applies individually. We need to get in front of young people with low literacy skills. Lisa Coy said that we don't have a

step for high school dropouts with an average of 5th grade academic score. WIA outcomes call for GEDs. We need something between 5th grade and helping students in our programs get a GED. We need ABE to raise test scores and then make clients more attractive to job training vendors and employers.

Sam Martin suggested some set-aside funding for a demo project to figure out what programming we have to do to reach back and open doors.

Irene Chalek said that we really have a role in education. Kristine Blum explained that she works for Junior Achievement and that she works with schools in the 52 communities north of Boston include Lawrence, Lowell and Lynn. She said that we always get bogged down trying to fit people into a square box. She stated that if you don't have basic skills there is no way we are going to ramp a youth up for a job in weeks. Are we trying to get more kids to show how well we can do or are we circling the drain because we are trying to help the lowest of the low and to get these kids in the door is very difficult. From a business standpoint, we need to identify the percentage of appropriate barriers and define what we want our achievements to be and who is our target market.

Ralph said that Kristine raised some of the same issues we are trying to address. You can't send kids to a 40 week program and hope to remediate what hasn't happened in 12 years of school. He said that the graduation rate for Hispanics from Massachusetts Community Colleges after 4 years is only about 12%, and we currently don't have anywhere near their resources.

Sam suggested revisiting the length of contracts and redefining programs. The U.S. Undersecretary of Labor recently recommended establishing multi-year youth employment training programs. Cal wondered if we should table this item and do further research. Ralph said that we are now doing our annual Youth RFP process and he doesn't want the same thing that happened last year to be repeated. We have \$104,000 for new group training and \$120,000 for ITAs and if we table this it will be business as usual for another year. He said that in Lawrence every child is at risk.

Sam said that we have a wide open opportunity to maybe look at a way to do both tiers so those youth can use leadership development and reach both sides.

Lisa said that the intent of WIA is to serve the most at risk but we may be doing more that is necessary because the board previously decided to do 70% OSY and WIA only requires that we serve 30%.

As regards vendors being given the opportunity to cream students, Lisa said that we are not in that situation right now. The kids aren't knocking down our doors trying to get into job training programs. In the future, if they are, we can revisit the proposed barrier expansion. She said that the Youth Council needs to make

a plea to the community to have more innovative programs, especially for young men.

Motion by Megan Shea to accept the three additional barriers as presented with the understanding that we can revisit this item as necessary in the future. Melanie Mericle seconded the motion and motion passed with Irene Chalek abstaining.

VI. FY'11 OSY Procurement

Deborah explained that the OSY Education and EMT Program has not been able to be filled due to various reasons, including the need for a driver's license and clean CORI checks. Some of the youth are being referred to the adult group program. We may not go forward with this OSY program and interested eligible youth would instead be referred to the Adult EMP program and ITAs. We are recommending that any de-obligated youth group funds go back to group programming.

Motion by Megan Shea to recommend allocating about \$104,000 in youth group programming and about another \$56,000 if the OSY Education and EMT Program is de-obligated. Kristine Blum seconded the motion and motion passed.

Deborah said that we will reissue a youth group RFP and add the additional barriers.

VII. Adjournment

Having no further business Megan Shea made a motion to adjourn seconded by Irene Chalek. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Mary Kivell
Recorder