



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, September 24, 2014

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Ron Contrado, Michael Munday, Juan Yepez

Members Absent: Robert Leblanc

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Mary Kivell

Others: Arthur Chilingirian

I. Approval of Minutes of August 27, 2014

A quorum being present Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 7:45 a.m. and called for a motion on the minutes of the August 27, 2014 meeting.

Motion by Mike Munday, seconded by Ron Contrado, to approve the minutes of the August 27, 2014 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. YouthWorks Update

Rafael Abislaiman said that the YouthWorks Summer Program went pretty well and that we fully expended public sector funding. We had 320 kids participate in the publicly funded program. He said that this is the first year of the Mayor's Initiative and we had 21 youth participants who were paid for by private sector employees and about twice as many in-kind youth employment slots committed by organizations who hired youth for the summer. Most of them wanted and received matching Youthworks subsidized youth.

Most program issues related to kids in the privately funded category. They were generally reliable but some chose to play basketball in their summer leagues rather than work. Normally we have 3-4% issues with subsidized youth but we had issues at about the 20% rate with the Mayor's Initiative kids from the Boys and Girls Club (BGC). BGC now knows to choose kids who will have work as a priority next year.

Rafael said that we are looking to use public sector funds to fill jobs at Tech Print and Sal's during the year. Those companies had problems with their private-pay youth placements. Rafael also said that the Mayor, GLCAC, the BGC and us are planning an event to recognize and thank private donors and recruit new ones. As noted, some donors will also be compensated with Year-Round Youthworks youth funds.

Ron Contrado said that the youth he subsidized and the Youthworks teen who worked for his company both did good jobs and he looks forward to participating next year.

III. WIOA Changes

Rafael asked Arthur Chilingirian (Chili) to go over some of the key changes in the new WIOA regulations. Chili stated that early implementation is allowed on July 1, 2015 and that the program must be implemented by July 1, 2016. He said that we would need to have training providers on board with the changes.

The WIO focus is to serve job seekers with "Barriers to Employment" and also focus on good jobs, and good wages with potential for growth. He said that the State Unified Plan calls for three customer categories (Title I DOL Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth; DESE Adult Education and Literacy; and Wagner Peyser). Partners are supposed to contribute to paying for infrastructure. There will also be some co-enrollments in programs and no more sequence of services. Job seekers will go from the front desk to a training program if they cannot find a job or can't make a comparable wage.

Chili stated that there are big changes in the youth category. Currently 30% of youth funding goes to out of school youth 16-21. Under WIOA 75% of youth funding will go to out of school youth who are 18-24 and there will be more of an overlap between the youth and adult categories. He said that there will be a comment period for the state plan. He also said that he would like partners that share the cost of the infrastructure to have a presence in the career center.

Chili then spoke about integration of services and what he went through with staff training. Just when VWCC was ready to implement it, the state union filed a grievance looking for additional wages and new job descriptions and implementation was stopped. State job descriptions and pay grades were changed but few State employees applied for the positions.

Rafael said that Chili paid a price for being pro-active but the plus is that municipal staff were trained how to do the state job and that we are now having fewer problems referring customers to WIA training. The difference between the State and municipal employee categories is that state employee success has traditionally been measured by how many people get jobs without training. WIA municipal staff want to get people into training more quickly when they can't find work. Chili mentioned that the new WIOA law doesn't mention state staffing but he feels that the state will want them in career centers.

Chili said that WIOA authorizes spending 20% of Adult/Dislocated Worker funds on incumbent workers. He said that that is what Workforce Training Funds now do. He said that WIOA is scheduled to have annual funding increases for five years. He wondered if there would be changes to the Workforce Training Fund. Another major concern is which 300 people get will enrolled in WIOA for intensive services when we may see 7-8,000 eligible people and how will the enrollment process will affect performance. Rafael mentioned that New York has counted everyone in WIA and their job outcome numbers are similar to Massachusetts though their performance percentage numbers must be much lower.

Chili said that regarding performance, jobs are now entered as successful employment one month after customer exit. Under WIOA entered employments will be counted four quarters after exit. Chili also said that under WIOA all training participants must come out with a credential and skills gains. Co-enrollment could also impact our performance.

Peter Matthews said that since the focus of WIOA is on people with barriers isn't that going backwards. Chili said that it is backwards by our local WIB standards but not according to WIOA. There was discussion about how WIOA can be both employer driven to meet employer needs and global competition while also focusing on people who possess skill below the 8th grade level academic skills.

Rafael said that there is disagreement on the hardest to serve mandate. For example, Secretary Kaprielian and Jennifer James may work out a deal with MA DESE since in Massachusetts they will receive WIOA Title II money. The Title II portion of WIOA is explicitly focused on the hardest to serve who need academic remediation and ESOL. We in the workforce development system will receive WIOA Title I funds to work with employers and help people get jobs. The degree to which we work with the hardest to serve may well be decided regionally.

Only WIOA Title II programs must teach English and provide academic remediation. Rafael doesn't think we in Title I need to focus on it and if we do we may be encouraging people to dropout out of school under the false supposition that there are enough federal funds to help them get good jobs. We as a WIB need to focus on getting job related credentials to people who have graduated from high school.

Peter Matthews said that financial literacy is mentioned in WIOA and the fact that Senators Tucker and Finegold had introduced legislation to make teaching financial literacy mandatory for every high school graduate and that the legislation has gone nowhere. Plenty of credit unions offered to volunteer to help execute the legislation but the teacher's union blocked it. They didn't want to teach financial literacy but also didn't want anyone else coming in to offer it.

Juan Yepez suggested speaking with Jeff Riley and offering a pilot program in Lawrence as a start. Chili also said that he and Cindy Key want to offer a financial literacy workshop at the career center. Juan said that he feels that we need them to go into the schools to reach a broader audience.

Mike Munday said that he has Fidelity come in to his company annually to speak to employees about finances. He also said that if you are training folks with barriers you can't expect to link them to \$16-\$17 per hour jobs. Chili said that when we do our plan we have different wages for adults, youth and dislocated workers. We are still trying to figure out the regulations and there will be a draft available January 18th with a 30-60 day comment period.

Rafael also said that WIOA includes consolidating a variety of programs serving people with different physical and mental barriers to employment. He said that we will continue discussing the new regulations at each Planning Committee meeting.

IV. Referrals to Higher Education Meeting with DCS

Rafael said that the meeting between Mayor Daniel Rivera, Alice Sweeney and Attorney Tim Dooling from DCS, Rafael Abislaiman, Arthur Chilingirian, Dawn Beati, Lisa Remington and Peter Matthews occurred. It was called to discuss the state's objections to an initiative that would create a mechanism to inform recently unemployed people about course information at area public colleges.

WIA and WIOA insist that WIBs work closely with partners and community colleges are mandated WIB partners nationwide. The Federal government has also dedicated millions of dollars to bringing Career Centers and Community Colleges together.

Mayor Rivera wants recently unemployed customers to be informed about NECC. We told the State that we have also included UMASS but our plan has still been rejected by them. We took minutes at the meeting and will try to find common ground.

Alice Sweeney said that the next step is to put the question to the federal WIA administrator in New England, Holly O'Brien. She has had a long working relationship with Alice. DCS's view is that we are favoring a single vendor. The Mayor argues that public community colleges are another arm of state government and that we should be able to work in partnership with them because there is a lot to be gained. People newly on UI may be quickly provided with information on other non-WIA opportunities for education and job training. DCS states that we will breaking the law in so preferring NECC.

Peter Matthews stated that, at the meeting, he said that we should implement it and then monitor it. If 7 out of 10 go to NECC and the others to Middlesex or others then

the results speak for themselves. People will figure out what they want to do. Many will chose NECC but others may opt for courses at other public colleges.

Juan Yepez suggested giving a list of all colleges from the Merrimack Valley to Boston with distance and average costs listed. Rafael stated that he would prefer providing only public college info because of the exorbitant cost of private colleges.

Mike Munday asked what law was broken and Chili said presenting only a single vendor and gathering information to share with a single vendor. Mike said that our customers may already be going to NECC and it may be ironic if we reduce that number by providing info on other colleges. Rafael said that Lawrence has 30% of its high school graduates going to community colleges, the highest percentage in the state. But he doesn't know with ones they attend.

Chili said that three years ago \$20m in federal funds was allocated for navigators to assist clients and talk about options for college. Now we want to implement an additional form to help refer customers to a single college and therein lies the problem in DCS's view.

Juan said he is not saying whether it is right or wrong but we already have a navigator who mostly refers to people at NECC. Rafael mentioned how low the graduation rate is after 6 years at Massachusetts community colleges because they accept everyone. But he said that sometimes when people want to improve things they must take risks.

Juan asked what are we looking to get and Rafael said the Mayor wants to raise incomes in Lawrence by having more residents attend college. Rafael said that a navigator sees about 20 people per month but there are thousands of people at career center workshop and information to them will probably generate more numbers to sign up and meet with the navigator.

Juan said that he agrees with the Mayor on raising income but we may be barking up the wrong tree. Chili said that we explain that people don't always understand the next steps after getting a high school diploma. Juan said that we need to present the earnings for non-college and then for a two year associates degree and a four year degree and get more people interested.

Rafael said that it is a little more complicated than Alice's view as we also refer youth to Job Corps which is funded by DOL. Their Devens complex enrollment has 70-80% of their enrollees going through our career center. Other vendors may want to provide the same service as Job Corps but there is a preference for that program and vendor.

Regarding WIOA, Rafael feels that the state will fight tooth and nail to include merit staff in any future program. Rather than them going away, regional roles could be less and less significant. He said that he is proud that this Planning Committee and board

supported adjusting the criteria for summer youth funding and eligibility when it had not happened for years, even after the 2008 financial meltdown.

Juan agrees that the youth eligibility was the right thing but said that we need to fight the battles we can win and wonders if this battle is worth fighting and whether we could come up with an alternative solution to show folks how important it is to go to college. Rafael said that we must weigh many things including exasperation in regional initiatives. It is good to assert regional solutions and regional roles.

The possibility of RFPing the career center with Chile as a consultant is looking good. Middlesex Community College runs two centers and has a close relationship with a third. He said that we need to find how they avoid being categorized as a preferred vendor. We need to be objective and rational and maintain the MVWB's objectivity as regards NECC.

V. Other Business

Rafael said that Chairman Bevilacqua will not be running for chair at the annual meeting. Hopefully, Planning Committee Chair Peter Matthews will be elected as chair at that meeting. This will precipitate a change in the Planning Committee and Rafael said that anyone who is interested in the chairmanship should speak up. He mentioned that the Mayor will be appointing new board members. Rafael also said that he asked the Mayor to consider being on the state WIB which will have an important role in formulating WIOA implementation. He noted that NY did not have a state WIB for over ten years and has only now put one together. Here in Massachusetts the state is the WIA administrator but it does not mention the State WIB on the organizational charts put out by the DCS. Objectivity and balance is sometimes lacking when only States interpret WIA and WIOA laws.

IV. Adjourn

Having no further business Juan Yepez made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Munday seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell.

Recorder