



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, April 21, 2015

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman
Rosalin Acosta, Dennis DiZoglio

Members Absent: Ron Contrado, Andrew Herlihy, Mike Munday, Abel Vargas

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Mary Kivell

Others: Arthur Chilingirian

I. Approval of Minutes of March 10, 2015

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 7:55 am. Chairman Yepez then called for a motion on the minutes of the March 10, 2015 meeting.

Motion by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Rosalin Acosta, to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2015 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. WIA/WIOA Customer Eligibility Requirements – Veterans ‘Barriers’

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman said that there has been no movement on the Veterans Eligibility issue but the state is focused on it. He said that Chili’s staff had done a fine job serving veterans for a number of years but our numbers have dropped since April of last year because of new ‘barriers’ regulations

Staff are working with a new criteria that requires significant barriers such as six months on UI and court involved which is the same issue that arose with youth. Rafael said that we advertise that we are responsive to employers but these federal-staff caused changes make us less responsive.

Bob Westcott said that we are making the employers fit the needs of the program rather than the needs of the employer. Rafael then spoke about the WIOA eligibility guidelines for board

members noting that we are pretty much in compliance except for a representative of a philanthropic organization and perhaps a union apprenticeship representative.

Rafael continued stating that there is historically high youth unemployment and the Commonwealth has currently cut funding for training activities. We don't get the support we need. He said he would we would do better if we were seen as an economic development agency rather than a pseudo social service one. Money is short everywhere and summer youth funds are currently \$30,000 less than last year. At the same time the minimum wage has increased which means that we'll help 20 fewer youth get jobs.

Chili said that each time they cut youth funding fewer youth will be served. Rafael explained that in Lawrence all youth are eligible but in Haverhill there is an income check and must be based on 200% of the poverty rate which is only \$24,000 per year for a family of two. He said that we are still asking employers to donate and match subsidized placements but directly employed youth will also count.

Rafael also mentioned that the standards are higher for WIA youth training participation. They must score 7.9 grade level and have a high school diploma or GED to get into a program. Sometimes they are placed as adults because that category allows a 6.9 minimum level. IN WIOA, youth can be up to age 24 instead of 14 to 21 under Youthworks.

III. Budget Update & Performance as of 3/31/15

MVWIB Treasurer Bob Westcott reported that he has met with Tracy Myszkowski three times since assuming the duties of treasure and noticed that the WIB has authority it hasn't used. He said that Tracy knows where the funding is and where it comes from for each program.

The budget update is through 3/31/15 and he distributed a graph showing how the budget flows. Tracy explained that although we are in FY'15 funding overlaps some two years. This budget is local and he is trying to get a better picture with the understanding that federal dollars have a two year life span. He stated that integrated budgets could have several different accounts and it will be even more complicated under WIOA.

Rafael said that we do not receive all the money at once. When we get an allocation we have to have the customer numbers to match the allocation. He noted that in the case of trade customers, they may be eligible for longer periods of training but some disappear and can't be trained.

Bob said that we are fortunate to have Tracy who understands the programs and funding sources and we are audited annually with no problems. Rafael said that when he first came here there was an \$850,000 deficit on paper but it was quickly reduced to a balanced budget/ Since then we have not had to do lay-offs but managed through staff attrition and other cost saving measures. We quickly respond to new funding opportunities and we've also saved \$150,000 by getting out of our old site in Haverhill. We also don't replace staff who have left right away. Chili said that the National Emergency Grant (NEG) for Philip Mersen is ending but

a Yoplait Yogurt NEG is going out and we may also get a NEG for Green Core in Newburyport. Rafael explained that a NEG is Federal funding when there's a large staff lay-off. For example, the Methuen Yoplait plant is closing.

Bob Westcott mentioned that Opportunity Works in Newburyport also has a site on NECC campus and wondered if they are partners. Rafael said that they are in a new building but it wouldn't work for us to be there as we don't provide the type of counseling their clients need. We also didn't want employers to think that their's is clientele we work with. Chili said that Opportunity Works clients came to a recent job fair but most of them needed work rehab. Moving toward WIOA we are looking at getting Mass Rehab on site as we don't have the capabilities to provide counseling to that population.

Rafael continued stating that we have a variety of funding with most of it being federal and state. State funding is being cut to address the MA deficit. Our current budget expenditures are on track with premises and personnel. Other areas are underspent and we will carry out some money into the next fiscal year. Most youth funding being spent during the summer months.

Chili said that when state and federal funding do not look good we try to carry out as much as we can into the new FY and also get additional NEGs. Rafael said that carry-outs help us minimize layoffs but that we have to spend at least 80% of each year's allocation in year one. Bob asked if we can utilize space funds for other purposes. Ralph answered yes. Juan mentioned that it looks like there will be money left over in overhead and wondered if we can roll it over to next year. Ralph said that overhead is the most flexible to carry over. Ralph also said that we spent a lot on IT last year to upgrade our servers and LAN and that this year the allocation is not too much.

Juan Yopez said that if we are going to lose funds then we should use them for things such as upgrades to the server, etc. Rafael and Chili agreed. They said that our biggest funding streams are WIA and Wagner/Peyser and we don't know what State guidance will be under WIOA. Currently, Chili oversees the state staff but their supervisor is in Boston.

Our third funding source is NEGs under WIA and the fourth is the state through YouthWorks and School to Careers. Rafael mentioned that the state WIB Association Executive Director, Don Gillis is spending a lot of time lobbying for additional School to Career funding for Boston but our region only gets \$80,000 and Boston gets about \$800,000. Our priority is YouthWorks.

Rosalin Acosta asked about outreach and Rafael said that we are connected to the UI system and folks previously had to come in to the Career Center to sign up etc. Since changing to UI Online, we have fewer customers. Our numbers have gone down from over 14,000 to 10,000. Juan said that he imagined other regions may be impacted more as our region's population may have more difficulty with online and phone applications. Rafael agreed and said that we do outreach and have a lot of partners but probably not enough. But we also don't want to overpromise. Rafael said that we don't want to market and then not be able to provide the

services. For example, we have a presence in our region's biggest high schools but we don't have enough money to get all the kids who want jobs into Youthworks jobs. Each year we see at least ten times more people than we can job train.

Chili stated that Business Service Representatives market our services to employers. The college is on board but very little of our funding goes to them due to their programs having set scheduling whereas the private vendors are more flexible with providing training classes.

Dennis DiZoglio mentioned best practices he forwarded to Rafael from UMass/Amherst on how to better connect with employers. He said that in the past the big companies did their own training but most in-house company training is now gone. Many have broken off into smaller companies that don't do training on a large scale.

Dennis said that perhaps the WIB could be a facilitator in bringing cluster employers together and talking on a regular basis. Rafael said that we are currently doing that for manufacturing and that he would send Dennis info on the matter.

Rosalin wondered if there is a particular program we are very good at and Chili said that depends on the clients' academic ability and work experience. Most of the lower skilled adults and youth go into health care training. Dislocated workers are usually are at a higher academic level and go into various types of training.

Rosalin wondered if we should be serving more folks. Juan said that the numbers can be deceiving because four or five thousand people come back to the career center many times and return visits are not counted in walk-in numbers. Chili agreed and said that the membership count for 2009, 2010, and 2011 are accurate and as the recession fades or people time out of UI, the numbers decrease as well as employment and job seekers numbers.

Chili said that not a lot of employed people come in. We do a lot of outreach through CBOs, Facebook and websites. Rafael said that Job Corps has a full time person on site and 90% of Devens participants come from here.

Chili said that under WIOA, vocational rehab education, higher education and AFDC will be paying infrastructure costs for the career center. Rafael said that he feels that new technologies have an impact and make coming in less necessary. He said that as far as aggregated training goes, a lot of employers have different goals but, for example, colleges often want cohort model with 15 or so people in the same class, for the same reason and at the same time. This is currently happening in manufacturing- related training and that makes sense at the entry level to help groups of people get entry-level jobs. But it makes less sense for apprenticeship programs or experienced, laid-off employee re-certification.

Businesses have different needs. For example, we have 70 employers in the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative (NAMC) but their needs are for various skills at different

levels. Bob Westcott said that employers would be more committed to hiring if they weren't penalized with UI if someone doesn't work out.

V. Other Business

Rosalin Acosta said that the 7:30 am start is a hardship for her and wondered if the other committee members would consider an 8:00 a.m. start. Committee members agreed to try the 8:00 am start for next meeting.

Bob Westcott then distributed a chart with the numbers of clients and towns they come from. He noted that 4% are from New Hampshire. Chili mentioned that WIA is universal access so folks can come into the Career Center but Lowell does restrict ITA to people who are residents. Rafael said that New Hampshire residents come here because we are a larger WIB and many New Hampshire residents were employed here in Massachusetts. Bob Westcott said that he feels that Lowell is more parochial than here and that we have more Spanish speakers in our career center. Rafael also said that if our training cap is \$6K and we served 1,000 people our total budget would be gone.

Chili said that he would like to bring up another item for discussion. He said that we are trying to be user friendly and we do a lot of OJTs. J and S Development Corporation DBA Stewart's Septic Services is in the process of applying for an OJT for a Septic Truck Driver/Septic Technician and has objected to the TABE testing. The requirements are that the worker holds a valid CDL driver's License, has a DOT physical, and can drive standard shift trucks and speaks English. The proposed change to the policy would allow waivers subject to review by two staff and a recommendation to waive the TABE with the concurrence of the Career Center and WIB Directors. Chili said that he has spoken with the state who agrees that for WIA/WOIA Adults and Dislocated Workers, unless the employer requires a reading or math level in their training plan, there is no need to slow the process down and can exempt customers from taking the TABE.

Motion by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Rosalin Acosta, to recommend to the board from the Planning Committee that under strict criteria any academic assessment, if requested in writing and employment is guaranteed, may be waived with the concurrence of the Career Center and WIB Directors. Motion passed.

VI. Adjourn

Having no further business Dennis DiZoglio made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rosalin Acosta seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell,

Recorder