

**Lower Merrimack Valley
Workforce Investment Area
Fiscal Year 2008 Annual Plan**

July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008

**LOWER MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Area consists of the following fifteen (15) cities and towns, collectively known as the Lower Merrimack Valley region: Andover, Amesbury, Boxford, Groveland, Georgetown, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Merrimac, Newbury, Newburyport, North Andover, Rowley, Salisbury and West Newbury. The Lower Merrimack Valley region has a culturally diverse client population that includes the following significant service groups: public assistance recipients, limited English speakers, individuals with disabilities, high school dropouts, and offenders.

The Workforce Investment Act Annual Plan requires the demonstration of partnership between the regional Workforce Investment Board, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I Administrator, and the One-Stop Career Center. In the Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Area (LMVWIA), the Workforce Investment Board is the *Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board (MVWIB)*, the Title I Administrator is the *Division of Grants Administration* and the One-Stop Career Center is the *ValleyWorks Career Center*, a workforce collaboration of the *Department of Training and Development (DTD)* and the *Division of Career Services (DCS)*. The ValleyWorks Career Center has two (2) comprehensive service sites, one based in the City of Lawrence and one in based in the City of Haverhill. Additionally, the ValleyWorks Career Center places staff on-site at the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to provide direct services to recipients of Transitional Aide to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), a priority population for services.

These agencies have worked together to craft the Annual Workforce Development Plan for Fiscal Year 2008, which includes the integration of the state's planning priorities, an analysis update of the local labor market conditions and characteristics of the region, which then drive the regional partners' response to the plan narrative questions. Additionally, the full plan will identify performance measures for the region, and the allocation of state and federal funds to meet these performance standards and workforce development system priorities.

Planning Priorities of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The Annual Plan guidance for fiscal year 2008 is continuing to be affected by the fact that the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has not yet been reauthorized. Therefore, the plans presented by the Commonwealth and each area are based on an additional year of service. The FY 2008 Annual Plan guidance provided to the workforce investment

areas is articulated through WIA Policy Communication No. 17-20, and includes both national and state level planning priorities.

For FY 2008, the plan guidance outlines that the fundamental goal for regions will focus on continuing improvements of the partnership between Workforce Investment Boards and Career Centers. The goal is to ensure our workforce development system is responsive to the changing local economies and that all partners are cognizant that our services need to meet the needs of critical, high growth sectors of the economy and the local workforce.

Although the Commonwealth's priorities for FY 2008 have not changed much from FY 2007, encouraging the continued development of a streamlined and responsive workforce system, for FY 2008 there is an emphasis on aligning service delivery and service improvements with the needs of critical, high growth sectors of the economy and local workforce.

As outlined in the plan guidance, "the Commonwealth has identified the following planning priorities for the state's workforce investment system:

- Support partnerships that strengthen the economic well-being of the regions and increase opportunities for the leveraging of funds.
- Align workforce investment services (especially training services) with high-growth, critical sectors in the region.
- Increase the efficiency in responsiveness to businesses by ensuring that employer services are integrated with other workforce or partner programs as appropriate.
- Assure that One-Stop Career Center front-line staff are trained to be knowledgeable of high-growth occupations and critical job vacancies.
- Use of formula and leveraged funds to close the "skill gap" through strategic talent development.
- Enhance the effectiveness of youth programming, especially for out-of-school youth and youth categorized as "hard-to-serve."

These state-level priorities are incorporated in the Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Region's Fiscal Year 2008 Workforce Development Business Plan.

Labor Market Analysis

For the FY 2008 the Labor Market Analysis will be updated based on the following documents:

- ◆ The Merrimack Valley Blue Print;
- ◆ The most recent Census data;
- ◆ The Regional LMI Profile (the Annual Profile for the Merrimack Valley Workforce Area – March 2007) as published by the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development ;
- ◆ The Monthly Regional Fact Sheets (as of January 2007 published by the Division of Career Services); and other sources.

A draft of the updated Labor Market Analysis can be found on the MVWIB website and will be incorporated into the full Annual Plan.

Plan Narrative

The Fiscal Year 2008 Workforce Development Business Plan requires responses to questions articulated in Mass Workforce WIA Policy Communication No. 17-20. In responding to these specific questions, the Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Area regional partners use three (3) critical documents as guides. These are:

1. The Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board Labor Force BluePrint;
2. The Charter document between the MVWIB and the ValleyWorks Career Center; and
3. The internal business plan/strategy of the ValleyWorks Career Center.

As noted above, state priorities are also integrated into the response. In FY 2007, the Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment area was significantly affected by an almost 21% reduction in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser funds. Efforts in FY 2007 to streamline and generate efficiencies between partner agencies were successful. The MVWIB successfully reorganized and, going into FY 2008, is fully staffed. The MVWIB's oversight function has been solidified and operational and programmatic staff have been moved to the One-Stop Career Center. Despite some transitional difficulties, this change has worked well and the regional entities have clarity and non-duplication in staffing and function.

The WIA and Wagner-Peyser allocations for FY 2008 have increased from FY 2007 as outlined below:

GRANT	FY 2007	FY 2008	\$ CHANGE	% CHANGE
WIA Adult	\$1,000,573	\$1,101,205	\$100,632	10.1%
WIA Dislocated Worker	\$822,172	\$1,062,124	\$239,952	29.2%
WIA Youth	\$1,158,103	\$1,222,935	\$64,832	5.6%
WP 90%	\$534,467	\$526,238	(\$8,229)	-1.5%
WP 10%	\$ 59,385	\$ 58,471	(\$ 914)	-1.5%
Total	\$3,574,700	\$3,970,973	\$396,273	11%

The total is approximately an 11% increase in the region's baseline grants. This should provide some assistance; however, it does not overcome the significant reduction experienced by the region in our previous fiscal year.

For our FY 2008 Integrated Budget, other grants are impacted as follows:

- The State One-Stop Allocation increased by \$8,653 to a new level of \$96,153;
- The Disaster/Flood National Emergency Grant was approved for an extension through to August 31, 2007;
- The Lucent National Emergency Grant will continue until September 30, 2007;
- The Smith & Nephew National Emergency Grant will operate until December 31,2007
- The region was notified to budget for 6 months of salary and fringe for the federal Navigator grant; and
- The Department of Training and Development's grants from the Division of Transitional Assistance are level funded for FY 2008.

Moving into Fiscal Year 2008, the region will continue to build on successes in FY 2007. For the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board, areas of emphases in FY 2007 included the Labor Market BluePrint, employer/industry teams, the committee structure of the Board, the Career Center charter, and ongoing resource development.

The MVWIB successfully procured a BluePrint Consultant, and the BluePrint originally generated in 2003 is currently being updated. It is expected that a final document will be released in early June of 2007 and for the next Fiscal Year, the MVWIB staff will be presenting this update and providing training to staff, area providers, and interested audiences.

The MVWIB, in partnership with the NorthShore WIB, the ValleyWorks Career Center, the DGA, employer partners, and regional community colleges, including Northern Essex Community College and NorthShore Community College, submitted a grant application to the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund (WCTF) to provide services and training to a group of Precision Manufacturing companies. The MVWIB worked with these employers on their training needs, the skills of their incumbent workers, and the gaps in the labor market and skills of the current job seeking customers of the Career Centers. The grant has tentatively been awarded and the MVWIB, as the lead agency, will be working with these employer partners into FY 2008.

The MVWIB was also a partner in another WCTF cross regional grants geared to the needs of employers in the HealthCare Industry. As a partner, the MVWIB will coordinate meetings with local healthcare employers and facilitate their activities in this WCTF grant.

In FY 2008, the MVWIB plans to focus on the growing food industry employers of the region and strategically planning to meet the training, hiring, and skills gap needs of this industry.

In FY 2007, the Board of the MVWIB actively met and the committee structure was finalized. The Planning Committee and Youth Council are meeting monthly. The Nominating Committee has been created and has begun to meet as needed. New business members are being recruited, with employers in critical and emerging industries being targeted for membership on the MVWIB.

The One Stop Career Center has been drafted and the Planning Committee is working diligently on a final document to be voted on by the full Board and in place prior to July 1, 2007. The Career Center charter for FY 2008 will have goals directly tied to WIA and grant specific performance as well as business and industry goals (impacted by the BluePrint update). The MVWIB will be reviewing plan versus actual performance and goal standards through the Charter document in FY 2008.

Finally, the MVWIB will focus on continuing to generate new resources to support the workforce development system and the regional partners. As noted, the WCTF competitive grant was approved and will be implemented in FY 2008. The MVWIB, working with the ValleyWorks Career Center, will be submitting for funding for in school youth services through the Connecting Activities grant. As grants are found, the MVWIB will convene and work with partners to submit competitive program designs to encourage additional resources and support for the region.

Job Seeker Customers

The ValleyWorks Career Center is the primary operational entity for service to job seeker customers. The Career Center planned to serve 14,000 customers in FY 2007, and as of April, 2007, has served 12,446 or 89% of planned goal. 22% of these customer do not have a High School Diploma, and 40% only have a high school diploma or GED. 89% of these customers are unemployed, yet only 44.7% are collecting unemployment insurance to financially support them.

For FY 2008, the Department of Training and Development has committed to blending the DTA skills funds with the WIA Low Income Title I Adult training resources, thus prioritizing training services to the most in need, TAFDC recipients. The regional partners have agreed to continue the policy of not requiring residency in the workforce region as an additional eligibility guideline for the Workforce Investment Act grants.

Priorities for FY 2008 will include the implementation of a group orientation (CCS) for membership into the ValleyWorks Career Centers, increasing performance and funding for the Division of Transitional Assistance grants, and accessing additional Rapid Response funding to support a counseling staff person. The Center will continue to obtain as much TRADE/TRA training dollars for our customers as possible.

Business Customers

The ValleyWorks Career Center (VWCC) is focused on aligning workforce investment activities with high growth industry sectors and identified critical and emerging industries in our region. As of the end of the third quarter, the Business Services Unit met the following goals:

Breakdown of Employers	VWCC Internal Goal	Third Quarter	Percent of Plan
		ACTUAL TO DATE	
Critical	250	288	115%
Emerging	75	73	97%
Professional/Technical	100	105	105%
Retail Trade	125	106	85%
Other	330	398	121%

As of the third quarter, the VWCC achieved 112% of plan for total service to employers, serving 983 distinct employers versus the goal of 880. This focus will continue in FY 2008.

In FY 2007, the VWCC managers and staff were trained by the DCS labor market team on regional labor trends and additionally, staff were provided LMI 101 training, also conducted by the DCS economists. In FY 2008, new staff will be encouraged to take this training if offered. The MVWIB will provide training to all staff on the updated Blueprint document in the new fiscal year.

The VWCC will continue utilizing its system of business surveys to continually gather ideas and feedback from the business customers. The annual survey will go out in early

July, which garners information on current services and ideas for the new needs of our business partners.

The Business Services Unit is fully staffed and meets regularly. The MVWIB staff attend these meetings to provide information on new employers and/or industry feedback. This staff team drives the job fairs, recruitment events, and connections with partner employment agencies.

Youth Services

The overarching strategy for the Merrimack Valley region is imbedded in our P-21 strategic action plan. The four major goals will continue to be as follows:

- Equitable resources across the region
- Enhance coordination
- Build on current success
- Encourage new models of learning.

The P-21 initiatives (Resource A and B) continue into FY 2008 and successes are reviewed by the Youth Council. Connecting Activities programming was moved to the ValleyWorks Career Center in FY 2007, with oversight by the MVWIB. These services will continue at the Career Center in FY 2008.

The models that will be used for FY 2008 for retention and service to the at-risk hard to serve populations are articulated through our Out of School and In School Request for Proposals (RFPs). For Out of School Youth, all programmatic designs must have an education program, geared to addressing the lack of a credential or basic skills deficiency in reading, math or both. All programs must have an occupational skills component, preferably resulting in a nationally recognized credential, and priority is given to those components addressing skills needs in an identified MVWIB critical or emerging industries. The positive outcome of these programs is employment in a training related position.

In FY 2008, the In School Youth programming must be targeted to seniors with no intention of going on to post secondary education, and the design must have a drop-out prevention and an occupational skills component. The goals for these programs is to help retain these youth through their senior year, help them obtain a high school diploma, provide them with relevant occupational skills training and competencies, and get them unsubsidized employment with a career path after graduation.

For FY 2008 the MVWIB has determined that priorities for WIA service will be youth with multiple barriers to success.

Training Resources

The Lower Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Area has a strong history of managing both the adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs with an eye to maximizing training resources for customers. The DTD has committed to blending the DTA training funds with the WIA Title I to increase those resources to the hardest to serve. The regional partners will be aggressive in the application for National Emergency Grants if circumstances arise in FY 2008 (major lay-offs or plant closings).

The ValleyWorks Career Center reviews all customers for eligibility to access TAA/TRA funds for training. The Center staff also works to access Pell and SEOG grants for training customers who are entering post secondary programs which offer that option. In this way, staff are maximizing limited federal training resources and ensuring that the WIA dollars are the funds of last resort.

The Career Center conducts a labor market assessment for the training selection as part of the full objective assessment. The goal is to educate our training customers to understand what industries and occupations are growing, and to align the training choices with targeted occupations in high growth areas. As noted previously, staff have been trained in Labor Market Information, both geared to the state as a whole and specific to growth in this region.

Operational Improvement

For FY 2008, the major operational change will be the shift in the methodology of how the orientations and memberships to the Career Centers occurs. New in FY 2008 will be the use of a group orientation. This will begin in July, 2007.

As noted, the Connecting Activities programmatic services are provided through the Career Center, and this will continue for FY 2008.

In FY 2007, additional software was purchased for the Learning Labs at both Center sites. In FY 2008, the goal will be to increase the available hours for self-paced learners to use both learning labs, and for the Haverhill site, increased computers.

In FY 2008, the Haverhill site may undergo a significant change. There is currently an RFP for space in an ongoing procurement for space for the Haverhill Career Center site. The RFP is requesting additional space, as utilization of the Haverhill site has increased over the past years.

The CQI process at the Career Center has been successful in FY 2007 and will continue into 2008.

Finally, the ValleyWorks Career Center is continuing its' research to implement a Job Readiness certificate for all VWCC members. This has been implemented for our youth customers, but has not yet come to fruition for all VWCC job seekers.

Partnerships

The MVWIB, working with the ValleyWorks Career Center staff, will outline all MOUs in place, and will ensure that all required MOUs will be in place for FY 2008.

The full LMVWIA Annual Plan must be submitted to the DCS on June 8, 2007. The overview presented in this executive summary will have significantly more detail in the full plan document and attachments will include an Integrated Budget and Performance Goals.