



Planning/ Career Center Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

8:00 a.m.

255 Essex Street, 4th Floor

Lawrence, MA 01840

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman
Andrew Herlihy, Abel Vargas, Bob Wescott,

Members Absent: Ron Contrado

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Susan Almono, Corina Ruiz

Other: Linda Rohrer

I. Approval of Minutes of the October 17, 2017 meeting

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez, called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. and then called for a motion on the minutes of the October 17, 2017 meeting.

Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by Abel Vargas, to approve the minutes of the October 17, 2017 meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. Performance Summary as of October 31, 2017

Rafael said that overall the numbers are good. The total job seeker and dislocated workers served numbers need to increase. Linda Rohrer added that she hopes the Haverhill numbers increase as well as the entered employment numbers. Juan asked if relocating to downtown Haverhill would help and Linda said yes.

Rafael said that unemployment is at a historical low. Linda added that the Lawrence UI numbers are still high. Linda said that in 2009, when unemployment was high, career centers tried to recruit more UI customers for career center services and even then it turned out to be difficult.

Bob explained the idea of extending UI benefits for people who do some type of work preparation as this would be more attractive for claimants and there is no risk. Linda mentioned past programs that tried that approach - Platform to Employment and Try-out to Employment. Discussion on the issue followed.

III. Budget Update as of October 31, 2017

Rafael said that a big part of the personnel salary expenditures to date were for summer youth employment wages. The Youthworks program went well and many youth were employed after the program ended. Ourto date costs are as expected.

Bob asked if NECC has been able to cost allocate and Linda said yes. VWCC has hired a new budget analyst who has been working closely with Tracy and Varsha.

Rafael mentioned that our Federal Polartec National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG), formerly called a National Emergency Grant or NEG, was approved. State Rapid Response funds will be requested to cover costs until NDWG contract funding is received. Rafael added that federal grants allows 10% admin cost while the state only allows 5% in admin costs. We are at 6.8% and will be asking the state to forgive the difference because of the time spent on repeated enquiries and applications.

Rafael concluded by saying that Susan completed an application to volunteer in Puerto Rico to help them with hurricane related workforce development activities. If she's chosen, she will go to Puerto Rico in February-March.

IV. Grants Update

Susan Almono gave the grants update. She said that the EPA and WCTF grants are moving forward. They are in the process of contacting trainers and the slated training start date is February 2018.

MVWIB was only one of five regions to receive a YouthWorks year-round contract. We will be working with Haverhill High School to certify 20 students in CompTIA A+. The program will be for 80 hours and will end in May 2018.

Susan said the MVWIB is still waiting to hear about the WCTF FY18 Earn and Learn proposal that we submitted. This proposal will be very competitive since only five programs will be funded statewide. A total of four Lawrence agencies submitted proposals. Abel asked which other agencies and Susan said the MVWIB, LARE, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council and Lawrence Community Works.

Susan concluded by saying that the MVWIB has been working closely with the City of Lawrence on various job fairs. Abel said that a local contractor will be receiving a demolition contract and another building will be constructing 102 housing units. They hope that will bring local jobs and Susan said the MVWIB has been advocating hiring local people for construction-related work.

V. Career Center Report

Linda said the Business Service Representative and Veterans unit organized the VWCC Veterans Federal Job Opportunities Event and Dinner. About 40 veterans attended. In the Council Chambers at City Hall, five employers described their companies/agencies and talked about their job application processes. Afterwords, everyone was invited to VWCC, where MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development Secretary, Rosalin Acosta, spoke and presented VWCC with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bronze Award for Outreach and Collaboration in Support of Veteran Job Seekers. Several resource agencies that provide veteran services were also available to chat with the attendees. A dinner followed in the VWCC Merrimack Room.

Linda said VWCC is serving hurricane impacted individuals from Puerto Rico. So far nineteen have visited the center. VWCC is working closely with DTA since most of the impacted individuals will go there first. VWCC has staff onsite at DTA on Thursdays. Linda added that the last time she spoke to Lawrence Public School staff, 53 hurricane impacted children have entered the LPS system. The State is working on a NDWG to serve the impacted individuals. According to data collected, most such individuals are going to Holyoke. The VWCC is one of the few centers that has Spanish speaking staff to assist these individuals.

Services in Haverhill are increasing. VWCC hired a part-time workshop facilitator who is mostly in Haverhill. Linda met with Ashley Moore of NECC to be able to offer VWCC customers access to workshops offered by NECC. Moving to downtown Haverhill would be ideal but we're making the best with current location.

Linda said she met with Megan Shea, who is working for the Haverhill Police Department under a Shannon grant. Megan said Haverhill gang activity has increased and that there are concerns about developing more activities focused on the Bridging the Opportunity Gap (BOG) grant. BOG helps youth who have delinquency records. Linda said that currently, we have 12 BOG participants, of whom eight are from Haverhill and four from Lawrence. Linda will be meeting with the DYS contact in Haverhill and see what can worked out. She will find out if BOG can provide additional resources. Linda said they are talking about having a separate pilot program in Haverhill as part of the WIOA youth experience.

Andrew confirmed that there has been a spike in Haverhill gang activity and that UMass did a study in gang activity. The City of Haverhill submitted an application for another Shannon grant.

Linda said VWCC is recruiting for the CNC operator program that will be hosted at Greater Lawrence Technical School. There are 10 slots for 17-29 year olds. Outreach has been done and they are tirelessly working to get the word out.

Linda said there will be changes in the customer flow. They received staff input and also reached out to other WIBs for their best practices. Linda will be meeting with Lowell CC staff to look at how their local and State staff integration is designed. She hopes to have the new customer flow changes implemented in January-February 2018.

Abel said that the 255 Essex street elevator has been fixed and we are now just waiting for state inspection.

Rafael said that in Glen Gary's absence, Carlos Jaquez is the contact person for any issues with the building.

Linda said that VWCC will be installing blinds in the next 2-3 weeks.

Bob asked Linda if she could email VWCC highlights prior to the meeting so the committee members have a chance to review and Linda said yes. Rafael added that Linda is doing an excellent job.

VI. WIOA Update

Rafael said we need new Board and Planning Committee members. The planning committee now has 5 members and we should add an additional 2, preferably female members. Juan asked the committee to come up with basic suggestions. Rafael suggested asking Mike Munday if his brother would like to be part of the committee. Abel Vargas suggested Fausto Garcia for the Board.

VII. Other Business

Rafael said one of the reasons that we have reduced funding is because our three year manufacturing contract ended. It was part of NAMC and totaled over 1 million dollars. We will look for other funding opportunities. He explained that the TechHire manufacturing contract we went to Mt. Wachusett Community College. MVWIB and NAMC were instrumental in their getting the contract but Community Colleges are driving the manufacturing training bus under that contract.

Rafael added that manufacturing employment numbers may go down but there are plenty of employment opportunities because of the average age of its employees. There was a generation that didn't work in manufacturing (25-45 year olds) so we now find ourselves looking for replacements for older workers (~65) who are retiring. Although the number of workers in manufacturing may continue going down, it still pays the highest average wages and is the biggest money generator in the Merrimack Valley. It is critical for us to sustain it.

VIII. Adjourn (vote required)

Having no further business Andrew Herlihy made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Bob Wescott, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder