



## PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

**Wednesday, March 5, 2014**

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Juan Yopez, Michael Munday, Ron Contrado, Joseph Bevilacqua

Members Absent: Robert Leblanc

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Barbara Zeimetz, Mary Kivell

Others: Arthur Chilingirian

### **I. Approval of Minutes of January 15, 2014**

A quorum being present Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. and called for a motion on the minutes of the January 15, 2014 meeting.

**Motion by Mike Munday, seconded by Juan Yopez, to approve the minutes of the January 15, 2014 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

### **II. Changes to Individual Training Account Policy**

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman said that the following changes are being recommended to the ITA Policy.

- 1.) Raise the Adult and Dislocated Worker CAPs to \$6,000 from \$4,500;
- 2.) Lower the Adult and Dislocated Worker minimum academic test threshold from 7.9 to 6.9 with joint agreement required by both the VWCC and MVWVIB Executive Directors for individual levels below 6.9;
- 3.) Give preference to individuals who live or worked in our region but remove the obligation that veterans are the only exception to this rule;
- 4.) If a customer is endorsed by an ABE/ESOL training provider as making outstanding progress in learning and as having excellent attendance and punctuality records (with documentation to support the endorsement)

the academic threshold may be lowered slightly more;

5.) Expand the possibility of using ITA funding in combination with other training resources.

Rafael Abislaiman explained that there are a few issues that have been mentioned by Chili and we are recommending raising the CAPs from \$6,000 to \$4,500. The reasoning is that it is not enough for clients who take a course where we pay a portion and they have to pay the rest out of pocket. We are also recommending for the Adult and Dislocated Worker's reducing the 7.9 cap to 6.9 as the higher end cap has proven a barrier for adults and dislocated workers for enrollment purposes as they are not meeting the grade level eligibility. He said that the cap will remain at 7.9 for Youth. Chili explained that the 7.9 grade level means that they are basic skills deficient.

We are also requesting a change to give preference to individuals in our WIB area but to also serve individuals from outside our WIB while keeping the veterans preference exception. Rafael explained that the funding is federal and enrollment is becoming difficult. UI online enrollment is taking a good deal of time. Staff must assist people using the automated system which is taking longer than in the past. Joe Bevilacqua asked where the other people are coming from and Chili said New Hampshire. Joe wondered if opening it up to New Hampshire residents would place a burden on the Career Center. Rafael said that Chili requested this change due to the difficulty with UI. Barbara Zeimetz said that in the past we always served those NH residents who worked in Massachusetts. Chili said that this change would mostly impact DW who could be from NH. He cited a recent example where five customers from out of the area couldn't get ITAs and we have funds that could have served them. Peter Matthews said that he recalled we served NH residents in the past. Chili explained that there are three categories Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker and this year we changed due to the reduction in funding.

Joe Bevilacqua said that he feels that with limited funds available they should be utilized to put Massachusetts workers back to work as long as there is a NH career center to serve them. Chili said that we would always give preference to Massachusetts residents and he recommends opening it to other regions as Dislocated Workers are the ones impacted.

Mike Munday wondered how many slots are not being filled with the high unemployment rate in Lawrence. Rafael said that we lost the first quarter due to sequestration and must reach our numbers in  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the time. Mike asked how many slots and Chili said that goal is 15 per month for the next 4 months. Barbara said that there are about 60 slots. Ralph said that it is a coincidence we are so close to the border where other WIBs draw from the center of the state. Mike said that people need a certain level of education or their chances of employment go down. Joe asked if people with that level of education can't get into one of our programs. Rafael said that people often don't consider training until their benefits run out. They wait until the last moment and now they have to go to work. Chili spoke about the state of North Carolina and how they cut UI and forced people off when they could have been trained instead of being forced into a dead end job.

Joe Bevilacqua spoke about his recent trip to Washington, DC and some changes that may be coming. The President had asked VP Joe Biden to explore UI through feedback and teleconferences. One concept is that people who are on UI can get a job through an OJT. There is more discussion in Washington on OJTs as they believe that training programs are not working. The connection to a job brings employment and long term UI is a detriment. Chili said that training programs related to jobs are working. Joe said that the buzz work is apprenticeship even in the trades and connecting with a job which may not be the best but gets someone into the regiment of working and an opportunity to move up the career ladder.

Barbara Zeimetz said that individuals with 99 weeks of UI and getting a reasonable check are not in a hurry to get a job although she agrees that connecting people to jobs is what should be happening. The people coming in now want continued support and are not ready to give up their unemployment benefits. She said that a lot of states have said that you need to work to have your money. Joe mentioned the idea of volunteerism and getting back in the getting up and coming to work regimen. The real concern is that businesses are not finding the skilled workers but there is also a real concern for soft skills. Barbara said that extended UI devalues work and we need to re-engage people spending time preparing for a new career. We should broaden our role and include NH where people do not get the same level of funding as here.

Joe said that we need to align education with workforce development and also mentioned that we don't begin talking to kids early enough to figure out how work is a value. Washington believes the workforce system has to do more. The Secretary and federal government up the chain to the president are gathering information. Joe said that the employer has to drive the job and at the recent Governors' meeting in Washington on workforce development an example from a Harvard professor of businesses getting together for common training programs mentioned that may get them sued. Peter Matthews said that his daughter is finishing her degree in Art Therapy and Psychology and has applied for a low paying job which she will take because she wants to work. There are some people who value and understand the importance of working. Barbara said that the people who are coming in want to get their benefits back. There is still a gap between UI and jobs.

Rafael said that the next item is a recommendation that if a customer is endorsed by an ABE/ESOL training provider as making outstanding progress in learning and as having excellent attendance and punctuality records (with documentation) the academic threshold may be lowered slightly more. Peter Matthews said that makes sense in certain cases and would provide an opportunity for success to someone who has the soft skills which would hopefully impact their outcome and training.

Rafael then said that we operate under WIA Title I and that WIA Title II deals with education. He suggested that we may want to look for ways to leverage Title II programs with Title I to serve lower level people. Barbara said that we now have some programs that incorporate ABE/ESOL within a training program and have encouraged trainers to build it in. Rafael said

that when we changed the criteria some vendors were having difficulty filling their GED programs. if we use Title I they may get better enrollments with a clear job component at the end. Joe said that in Washington the whole Job Training concept is connecting training to a job. Chili said that we have run stand alone ESOL programs in the past and they killed our performance. Rafael said that the intent is spending less and helping lower level people. Now we have a two silo system. Barbara said that we are responsible performance-wise for Adult ABE/ESOL and job training and as soon as our resources are not focused on getting the outcomes we are funded for, we will be sanctioned. The reason ABE vendors are not happy is they are expected to get to a certain point and that is not happening. Rafael said that no way can our resources match the problem and he said that he is just suggesting exploring if we could work together with Title I and Title II money to help people get jobs.

Peter Matthews said that he was confused and wondered why GED programs would not be filled. Mike Munday said that one year ago he thought that there were not enough places to get a GED. Chili said that we have a pathways program that puts people to the head of the list for GED training. Recently we had 15 people who came for GED/ESL programs and we referred them to jobs. Rafael said that based on his 19 years of experience there are not enough programs and a very high turnover with low retention. What he is suggesting would be more in the context of youth as there are all sorts of Title II programs not serving youth.

Joe Bevilacqua again referenced the discussion in Washington and the concern with programs just training and not connecting to jobs. What will happen is an alignment with actually getting a job and better aligning programs so they work together. Rafael said that is way everyone wants job training to work but the devil is in the details. Peter said that the question is do these changes help people get a job. Joe said that the current chair of the National Governors' Association is the governor of Oklahoma whose goal is education and workforce development.

Peter Matthews then asked committee members if they were in agreement with the first four items and just confused about the fifth item. Juan Yopez asked why go from a 7.9 to a 6.9 and Chili said that they have difficulties with limited English speakers who didn't meet the next grade level. Discussion then followed on GED training and the Pathways program that combines education and job training. Rafael said that what he has suggested is a principle rather than the old fashioned way and tasking Title II to do a better job if that includes a job component. Barbara said that four out of five providers have pathways programs but receive no push back from DOE to see what they are doing. Chili cited a Methuen program that sends folks into the career center to use the resource room and get jobs. Rafael also mentioned that it is difficult to get a GED.

Peter Matthews said that our primary goal is to get jobs not GEDs and Juan agreed our purpose is to create jobs. Peter also said that Rafael may be on to something and should continue to flesh out some more information and bring it back to the committee.

**Motion by Mike Munday, seconded by Juan Yopez, to accept and approve the top four items on changes to the ITA policy effective today. Motion passed with Joseph Bevilacqua abstaining.**

**III. Support for Group or Customized WIA Training for new Southwick employees in order to keep the company growing in the MBWIA**

Rafael Abislaiman said that the City of Haverhill has been in discussion with Southwick who is in need of additional space to expand and the city has identified a building which may be suitable. Southwick has also been in conversation with North Carolina. The city has asked if the WIB would go on record as supporting Southwick staying in Haverhill through using some WIA dollars to help train employees in the event they stay and expand their workforce. Juan said if they are already moving it won't matter if we say we support training. Rafael said that any support would be contingent on them staying. Joe Bevilacqua said that showing support and stating we have available funding for employee training may encourage them to stay and grow. Discussion followed and it was agreed to be supportive of Southwick remaining in the region and expanding with support based on adequate funding to be determined based on the final outcome.

**Ron Contrado made a motion, seconded by Juan Yopez, that the MVWIB supports Regional WIA group or customized training for Southwick employees. Motion passed with Joseph Bevilacqua abstaining.**

**IV. Other Business**

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman said that our lease for space is still pending. The city is putting out procurement for Community Development, the School Department and the WIB. This is the first time we are under the city procurement as we have always done our own procurement in the past. Since we are also under DCS, we need to have a meeting and this is still a work in progress.

Peter Matthews asked if the Mayor is aware of the costs and Rafael said that he is and we have not been paying the 50% premium on our expired lease. Joe said that we are a regional organization and this makes us look like an arm of the city. He suggested we have a meeting with the Mayor and explain our position. Rafael also said that he provided three versions of the CEO agreement and has not gotten any response as yet. Joe once again said that we are a separate, regional entity and he is concerned we are so attached to the city if sharing space. Rafael explained that the procurement has three separate sections and we want to be contiguous to the downtown but not in the same space. It is understandable that the city wants us close to other services. There was discussion on the number of parking spaces needed and the fact that if funding should go away the city would liable for the office space.

Rafael also said that he sent over the lease for the Haverhill space which he said supports us being regional and able to do this.

Joe said that basically what we want is the best space at the best cost to serve our clients. He said that he supports the new Mayor and his vision and feels that a meeting to convey our thoughts is in order. Peter Matthews also agreed to attend a meeting with the Mayor, Joe and Rafael.

**IV. Adjourn**

**Having no further business Juan Yopez made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ron Contrado seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell,*

Recorder