



**PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes**

Thursday, May 12, 2016

8:00 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman
Ron Contrado, Andrew Herlihy, Bob Westcott

Members Absent: Rosalin Acosta, Dennis DiZoglio, Mike Munday, Abel Vargas

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Susan Almono, Mary Kivell

Others: Arthur Chilingirian, Eddie Bartkiewicz, Varsha Gandhi, Amy Weatherbee

I. Approval of Minutes of February 16, 2016 and April 19, 2016

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. He introduced Eddie Bartkiewicz and said Eddie would speak on whether the Planning Committee is following WIOA guidelines by setting grade level eligibility standards for admission to training. Mr. Yepez also introduced Varsha Gandhi from DGA.

Chairman Yepez then called on Rafael Abislaiman. Rafael said that Rosalin Acosta asked for the February 16, 2016 minutes to be tabled after offering some suggestions and edits. Rafael said that he also added a couple of additional edits based on her most recent email. Juan then called for a motion on the minutes of the February 16, 2016 meeting.

Motion by Bob Westcott, seconded by Ron Contrado, to approve the minutes of the February 16, 2016 meeting as revised and submitted. Motion passed.

Mr. Yepez then asked if there were any changes or additions to the minutes of the April 19, 2016 meeting and hearing none called for a motion on the minutes.

Motion by Andrew Herlihy, seconded by Ron Contrado, to approve the minutes of the April 19, 2016 meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. Performance Summary as of Third Quarter ending 3/31/16

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman referred to the Performance Summary document and noted the percentage of career center clients (dislocated worker, adult and youth) without a high school education is 11%. Rafael said that many of the people constituting the 11% may be from the Caribbean, where, if they live in the country and work on a farm, they did not have access to education.

Bob wondered if the percentage of customers' residency varies very much. He also questioned the difference in the percentage of NH residents served in Lawrence as compared to the Lowell and North Shore. Chili said that Lowell has a residency requirement. The Haverhill Career Center is not a comprehensive center in that there are no seminars in Haverhill so customers have to come to Lawrence.

III. Budget Update

Treasurer Bob Westcott reported that spending is where it should be this time of the year. Overall youth training dollars are low but with the recent RFP out for a new round of group training we will obligate our Youth money. Chili said that we have expended all our adult money with the exception of what we transferred from the adult to the dislocated worker category. Chili said that the only budget problem involves youth. He also said that he has written to DCS to add Mayo Clinic and CBE to the NEG for additional money for dislocated workers in the pipeline.

Amy said she is also working with Susan on steering candidates to non-WIOA funded training programs. Bob Westcott asked if we can partner with other WIBs and find a way for participants to get transportation perhaps talking with the MVRTA or local non-profits. Susan said that EPA participants are being transported to Tewksbury for training.

Amy said that the Mass Manufacturing Extension is doing two trainings and we are doing an email blast out to prospective candidates. The NAMC is working with NECC and the technical schools for training that is not WIOA funded.

Juan wondered if we could request or require a training facility to do its training in Lawrence. Rafael said that vendors have to support their facility costs and requiring them to train at a site in Lawrence may be a hardship. Amy cited the example of Great Bay Community College out of Portsmouth, NH who has a mobile welding unit. Susan said that it is good to discuss strategies for transportation with vendors like mobile units and other trainers that may have a van.

IV. Out of School Youth Group Bid Analysis and Staff Recommendations

Susan Almono said that the proposal review committee met yesterday. They had received two proposals in response to the OSY Group Training RFP, both from LARE. One was for Microsoft Office and Customer Service Certification and the second one was for Electronic Assembler certification. Both programs had an occupational skills and GED/HiSet component. The proposal review committee is recommending the Electronic Assembler program for funding.

Susan continued stating that Microsoft Office and Customer Service is not recommended at this time because there were questions about the training and student cohorts. It was felt that the technical training is too light with Microsoft Word only and not the full Microsoft Suite. Amy noted that the vendor does offer a Business Tech Program that has the full Microsoft Suite but not in this submission.

Susan explained the handout passed out and stated that it shows training hours and a month of work experience including three weeks that are paid. The cost per is \$6,000. Susan said the proposal is going in the right direction but we need to talk about strengthening programs beginning next year as folks need more than just Microsoft Word to be attractive to employers.

Susan said that the Electronic Assembler proposal has some of the same components with academic remediation to train 10 students plus work experience. Eddie Bartkiewicz questioned how we defined basic skills deficient. Eddie said that basic skills deficient is defined as anyone below the 9th grade level in the federal regulations. Juan asked what the total number of hours in the Electronic program would be in the work experience. Varsha Gandhi said 25 hours per week (one week unpaid and three weeks paid) for a total of 625 hours. Bob asked if there are openings for assemblers and employer letters of support. Susan said that based on research by NAMC there are openings and graduates of the NAMC program are getting hired. She said that with Raytheon looking for workers, small companies may hire due to employees moving on to Raytheon. Chili said that LARE has strong employer relationships and Eddie Bartkiewicz said that it sounds like a good career pathway into this industry.

Rafael said we should be clear that electronic manufacturing job opportunities are mostly due to an aging workforce. In the long term, advances in computers and robotics will cause a decrease in total workforce demand. Amy said that there are NAMC funds for advertisement and we may be able to advertise as part of recruitment.

Motion by Bob Westcott to approve the recommendation of the staff review committee to fund the LARE/American Training, Inc. OSY Education and Electronic Assembler Program as presented. Ron Contrado seconded the motion and the motion passed.

Bob Westcott wondered about eliminating the middle man and going directly to the manufacturer and having them run an internship/mentoring program for exactly what they need. Eddie said that you can't use WTF for apprenticeships as it is for the employers' workers and the split is 50/50 for training and OJTs. He said there is also customized training and other avenues that could be pursued.

Juan said that he wanted to thank Susan, Amy, Chili and Varsha and the Proposal Review Committee for putting this together in a short time. He wondered if there were another 2 or 3 proposal applicants could we accommodate them. Rafael said that a total of 2 was possible but not 3.

Juan asked about the short RFP timeframe mentioned by some possible bidders at the quarterly meeting. Varsha said they had about a six (6) week turnaround. Rafael said we may want to put out similar RFPs many months in advance so that bidders can develop new programs. Vendors cannot both create a new program and respond well to a RFP. We had six possible vendors come to the bidder's conference and only one submitted a proposal. We need vendors who can provide more than one type of training. We can't ask vendors to do XYZ because we can't guarantee funding. We need to find ways to help build capacity without a funding guarantee.

There are not a lot of vendors and not a lot of WIOA training dollars. We try to grow non-WIOA training money through such things as EPA grants and new state-funded grant for heavy equipment operator training. Rafael said that we should have a more direct relationship with the vocational schools. The Vokes have guaranteed income but they are finding that students trained in the trades can't get licensed because the unions limit the numbers. He said that we need to make every effort to build training capacity.

Amy said that we could send an open invitation to vendors stating that we are doing an equal opportunity vendor development session for those who want to take advantage of technical assistance. Amy also mentioned getting our DESE and Occupational Skills training vendors together. Rafael said that as a WIOA Title II education provider, DESE ABE providers were promised additional points in the proposal review. An entity such as a College that is also a DESE ABE provider was a likely bidder but they didn't respond.

Chili took a look at past years and the vendor population has decreased. He said that when WIA came in we were at full employment. Group training under JTPAs transitioned to ITAs. Chili said that ITAs hurt the system as vendors couldn't offer training with only one or two folks in the classroom. We lost good vendors because of this. Chili said that we should look at Labor Market Information (LMI) and see about doing some group programs which Amy said could be geographically diverse.

Eddie Bartkiewicz said that there is good LMI available but most Labor Market Information (LMI) is two or three years old. He said that Greg Bun is now responsible for LMI and can get us good LMI information. Rafael said that it would be good to see what sectors are laying off. Eddie said he would see about getting Greg Bun out to see what we can get.

Bob spoke about having employers send a monthly email on employee needs but Rafael said that once it becomes routine it becomes ignored. Susan said that we need to think about where to go to employers to talk and see if this information is correct. Eddie said that the Worcester WIB tried to survey their employer members monthly and after eight months were not getting any responses. Eddie asked how long we gave for bidders to respond and Varsha said about six (6) weeks.

Eddie referenced Career Readiness 101. He said that in Fall River they went out and said to employers, here is a program and if candidates are trained will you hire them. Eventually the companies were willing to hire them based on the Business Services Representatives going out

and marketing. Rafael said that our BSR's have been doing marketing for years. It may be a good idea to use Career 101 alongside TABE and other software programs. Those services are between counseling and training. They don't necessarily involve training money which is very tight. In Fall River, Chili said, they got a green light from the board and they are offering the soft skills portion of 101. But we need a commitment from the state to get employers to accept the soft skills certification. Amy said that New Hampshire Career Centers have been working with Career Ready 101 and educating employers to the value of the different levels of certifications such as bronze, silver, gold and platinum certifications. We need to market and educate employers on 101.

V. Site RFP & WIOA Update

Rafael reported that the Site Review Committee completed their review of three proposals and sent their findings to the Mayor who has tabled their recommendation as is mentioned as his right within the RFP. As a result of court proceedings the city has been ruled liable for \$2.5 million in repairs an Essex Street building and has opted to buy the property for \$3.5 million. This is likely where we will go. The city has \$1.8 million and maybe \$3M to bring it up to speed. They are rfp'ing for a new roof and chilling units for the building, then the interior work can begin. The WIB is paying an architect to provide space design recommendations. We are starting to work with the city and the school department and general contractor Glenn Gary. Work should be done sometime in the fall.

We negotiated with the current landlord to pay an additional 50% of the lease beginning July 1, 2016. The city will waive the lease payments until the end of December and we will cover utilities. The WIB may be the first to go and the career center later. Rafael said that it is his understanding that arrangements between public entities don't require an RFP. Eddie expressed concerns with ADA compliance, the condition of the building and the use of federal funds for a non RFP'd site.

Juan Yopez spoke about new laws that holdover tenants may be responsible for landlord losses if they lose out a five year lease. Eddie said that another thing that bothers him is the parking and discussion followed with mention that there is covered parking about a block away. Rafael said that he would refer Eddie to the municipal lawyer regarding questions pertaining to the RFP and federal dollars.

Rafael said that one of the things that comes into play is the differences in regions. He also said that different WIB regions have different indirect costs. We are one of the few locations where career center and WIB staff are city employees. We contribute 20% to the cost for retirement but the city says that doesn't cover future cost. The city has not been financially compensated for being fiscal agent, has been incurring costs, and has been a good partner. Mayor Rivera is the second Hispanic Mayor who has wanted to move us downtown. They see an opportunity to make Career Center services more accessible to poor people while also helping to revitalize the inner City.

Eddie said that he may have to check with the attorney general on the 30B process or there may be questioned costs. He wants to make sure we are on the right avenue and don't put

federal dollars in jeopardy. Amy said that we have an intergovernmental agreement with NECC for the Haverhill Career Center allowing a site without bidding. Rafael said that every process has to be legal. When Boston attempted to reduce the number of career centers from three to two to save money, they ended up spending more money when the union, governor and mayor agreed to save state employee career center jobs. Eddie said that is not true. Rafael said that it was publicly stated by the PIC Director in Boston at a formal public event. Eddie said that a competitive process with a successful bidder is usually required and one needs to be careful during such a process. Rafael said that we will get a good lease rate from the city, no higher than the lowest RFP bidder. We stand by for clarification from the feds on the use of WIOA funds for a city-owned downtown site.

VI. Other Business

Juan asked Eddie to speak about the concerns he raised at the recent WIB Quarterly meeting. Eddie said that the DCS is moving forward holding meetings on the MOUs with partners on the state plan. He said that he has questions on the setting of standards for training eligibility.

Rafael said that WIOA processes are still in a state of flux and we are all awaiting direction from the Feds. He said that the question of standards boils down to the legality of any standard. The MVWIB standard instituted for youth is that a high school diploma or GED and a minimum grade level 7.9 are required. We have also instituted a waiver of these standards for fast learning adults and dislocated workers categories. For the group OSY training program, we instituted a less rigorous criteria of either a high school diploma or GED and a minimum 5.9 grade level, or no high school diploma and a minimum of 7 grade level. But fundamentally, the issue is whether a WIB can create any standard.

Eddie said that, as he sees it, the issue is basic skills deficiency. He continued saying that the basic skills deficiency is any grade below the 9th grade level for both in and out of school youth. When you put restrictions it sounds to him like we are restricting who can be served that have basic skill deficiencies. This may not match WIOA eligibility requirements.

Rafael said that we are only restricting training and not services. All youth are eligible for career center services. OSY are either high school graduates or high school dropouts and we selected high school graduates many of whom have basic skill deficiencies. He continued, stating that the MVWIB academic standards for training were set when UI was very high and it was understood that we could lower our standards when UI is low. But we also have a unique situation in our region. Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) was the only MA school system in State Receivership and we once had a fifty percent drop-out rate. We didn't and we still don't want to be seen as an alternative to high school graduation. We wanted to reinforce LPS's efforts to keep kids in school, learning until they graduate.

Eddie said that what we are doing is creaming and he will have to put something in writing which may draw the feds attention. Rafael said that he does not see it as creaming. The majority of the kids we see with high school diplomas don't have high school level academic skills and they need academic remediation. We want kids to stay in high school. WIOA Title

II entities are specifically charged with addressing high school drop-outs and their ABE deficiencies. No where in WIOA does it say that Title I programs have to do everything.

Juan said that we are hearing one side at the quarterly meeting and another side here and we are trying to do the best we can as a committee and executive team to figure out our responsibility. He further stated that if Eddie has some concerns to put them in writing and we could review his concerns and respond.

Eddie said he would be happy to put something in writing but also said that the feds may look at it. Chili said that we have already been monitored by DCS and the Feds and there were no findings. Eddie said that whatever the determination is, he can guarantee that he and DCS won't go backwards and declare invalid costs for what's happened. But he cannot guarantee that the feds wouldn't.

Juan suggested having another meeting before putting something in writing and Rafael respectfully disagreed stating that it should be in writing so we know what we are dealing with as there a lot of different, sometimes contradictory things in WIOA and a lot of different interpretations on those things.

Eddie said that he is willing to negotiate and agreed to another meeting before he puts anything in writing. He also said that he would also bring the state youth person in so we touch on all avenues. Amy said that she would also like to note that the eligibility checklist utilized in our youth department is aligned with issuances and has been monitored more than once. Eddie asked if someone doesn't meet the requirements are they turned away. Amy said that we use the eligibility required but also the votes of the board. She said that she may not serve them is youth but we put them in career readiness or somewhere where they can increase their skills and youth 18 and older also qualify in the Adult category that doesn't have the high school graduate or GED requirement. Chili said that if someone comes in and can't do the TABE then they can't do the training. We're not turning away basic skills deficient. Eddie said that then we have this mandate from the WIB that says X. Eddie said why don't you wipe out the mandate and do what you have been doing all along. Ralph said we have always worked with the kids but we have to prioritize who gets service and discourage inner-city kids from dropping out of school.

Eddie said he has a problem with our prioritizing those who are more advanced and not working with the most in need. Eddie said that our youth numbers have been going down. Chili said that we can work with them but not put them in WIOA and numbers statewide are going down.

Rafael said that we provide services to everyone and always have. He said that the vast majority of our customers do not receive training. There are 10,000 customers per year and only 300 receive training. We need to prioritize who is going to be trained. He doesn't feel it is creaming to require a 7.9 grade level for individual training. For the group proposal, we lowered it to the 5.9 grade level. That too may be illegal if any clearly articulated standard is illegal. But we can still provide all youth with a variety of services other than training.

Rafael said that as a past ABE provider, he saw going through publicly supported training several times after they dropped out and that is wrong. The dropout rate for kids is usually about 20% but in Lawrence the dropout rate is currently 40%. We have to do better.

Bob Westcott said that he has spent time looking at WIOA and wonders what value is in looking at someone who doesn't meet the 5.9 threshold. Is our mission to put people in jobs or are we just doing social work? Eddie said that the citations are clear and this is just the law, regulations will come later. Chili mentioned WIOA wants services to people with significant barriers and that five years ago a lot of OSY vendors left. Eddie said that he had one more youth program person to talk to at the office regarding youth issues.

Amy said that we are now going through a 7% allocation cut across all categories and asked whether other WIBs prioritize who gets trained due to limited funds? Amy noted that other WIBs prioritize based on residency. Eddie said a residency requirement is allowed in WIOA and other WIBs have not prioritized like here. He said he would go back and look into this and get back to the WIB.

VII. Adjourn

Having no further business Andrew Herlihy made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Ron Contrado and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell,

Recorder