



**PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes**

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

8:00 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board
Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman
Rosalin Acosta, Dennis DiZoglio, Abel Vargas, Bob Westcott

Members Absent: Ron Contrado, Mike Munday

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Susan Almono, Mary Kivell

Others: Arthur Chilingirian, Amy Weatherbee

I. Approval of Minutes of September 15, 2015

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. Chairman Yepez then called for a motion on the minutes of the September 15, 2015 meeting.

Motion by Bob Westcott, seconded by Abel Vargas, to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2015 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

II. Performance Summary as of 8/31/15

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman noted that we are only two months into this fiscal year. Rafael said that we are ahead in most categories with only one below and that is Entered Employments. Those numbers will improve once customer trainings are completed. Only some training sessions have ended and most training programs need new enrollees or this fiscal year.

Abel asked if we started FY'16 differently than prior years. Chili said that some plan numbers are a little lower due to less UI clients coming in. Amy commented that the plan goals were approved at the Planning Committee using historical data. Juan said that we looked at the numbers for the last two or three years and that's why they are what they are.

Rafael said that yesterday MA announced that 7,000 net additional jobs but the unemployment rate still went down. The assumption is that UI went down because 20,000 job seekers stopped looking for work. On that basis the state lowered the rate.

Dennis wondered if the 4.6% UI rate is due to what we said or due to the economy improving. Rafael said that the current percentage of employed people is equal to the percentage of employed people in 1978 when there were fewer women in the workforce. The workforce participation rate was higher ten or twenty years ago.

Abel said that a steady increase in employment is not now indicated by national trends. Bob Westcott said that there are now more people who have stopped looking for a job. There have been experience and attitude changes that have resulted in a larger percentage of people who are no longer contributing to the economy but are instead supported by people who work.

Chili said that a good economy is a myth. The majority of new hire are now working part time while looking for full time work. Rafael said that no one can survive on public assistance and most have something on the side in the grey economy.

III. ITA Policy Changes

Rafael said that for the past several months staff have been bringing ITA policy revisions to the Planning Committee. We may have more going forward as we transition from WIA TO WIOA. Rafael explained that we need to include 14 required Youth Service Elements as part of the new WIOA ITA Policy. There were 10 Elements under WIA. These are federal regulations required for WIOA youth training programs. Trainers are required to do some but not all of the elements. ITA billing statements will include vendor reports on which elements they are providing in their program.

Juan asked if there is a minimum required and Rafael said no but skills training and instruction are automatically included. In the MVWIB, they are all also providing post-secondary education since we require a high school diploma or HiSet to qualify for a youth ITA. Amy said that these elements are for vendors as our career counselors provide counseling on where to access services so that Service Element can be provided in-house.

Juan said that it is his opinion that tutoring and financial literacy should be offered. Bob Westcott questioned how you teach entrepreneurial skills training and how we get credit for doing so. Chili said that there is no method to capture this outcome. Abel asked how comprehensive is the training and do they develop a business plan. Bob said that the greatest entrepreneurial incentive is hunger and referenced a recent trip to Alaska and how folks provide lots of services there.

Chili said that as part of their ITA billing, vendors will report the services they've provided or plan to provide. That information will be given to Fiscal and then recorded in trainee records.

There was discussion on partner agencies such as Job Corps and DESE who pay rent to the Career Center. Amy said that Youth Counselors relay information to the youth and also that we could have more partners provide in house services and referral going forward.

Rafael said that at a future date he will address another aspect of the youth program and that is getting a better count of those served without being referred to training. Currently those not referred to training are not counted as a way of avoiding negatively impacting our youth performance numbers. We keep participant number low to keep outcomes high. But in consequence it looks as if youth staff are not doing much. We therefore need to create new mechanisms, perhaps using Wagner Peyser funds, to give a better picture of the number of youth being served.

Rafael said that this region and Holyoke have the highest number of youth who are disconnected – defined as neither working nor in school. Juan said that is an excellent idea to come up with ways to get those expanded service numbers. It would be better for us, the state and nation to find what works with young people.

Rosalin asked about programs with non-WIA and non-Wagner Peyser funding. Rafael said that the state has various such programs. Connecting Activities is the most well-known but those resources mostly go to funding Boston. The Boston WIB has 35 youth staff members and we have 5. He said that we do well in the state system as a whole.

The state provides Connecting Activities funding mostly to Boston which receives several hundred thousand dollars per year. We and other WIBs now receive about \$85,000 per year. Rafael said that we need to be more entrepreneurial about recording our youth efforts. Perhaps we can have all high seniors in our Summer Youth employment program become career center members, provide them with career center seminars, and enroll them under the Wagner-Peyser category.

Chili explained that we have funding for youth through Connecting Activities, BOG, DYS and Youthworks. WIA/WIOA is the only funding area where we ask for a high school diploma or HiSet for admittance in training programs. The resource room is available for all 18-24 with no qualifications and we are trying to market to disconnected youth. We have also had a few waivers for those a little below the 7.9 threshold and they are succeeding. It is a challenge to engage the disconnected youth who are the hardest to serve.

Rosalin asked if we are helping these youth who are not getting served get a GED. Amy said that we refer them to DESE programs and have someone from DESE in the Career Center. Amy also said that adult education groups are aware of our services and our Business Service Reps go out to groups to market our services.

Rosalin said that the Community Foundation has funded a program in Boston that is very successful. Perhaps we should look at the ECCF and go outside government funding and the restrictions that public funding carries. She asked whether we are approaching the problem based on formulas given us or if we approaching them with the best local solution to a problem.

Juan explained that the reason for the change to the requirement for a high school diploma or HiSet and for a 7.9 youth grade level skills for youth ITAs is that they cost \$5,000-\$6,000 and the board felt it is a better to use of funds for low income youth with a high school diploma or HiSet rather than for a youth who dropped out.

Chili said that past experience with remedial and occupational skills programs had instances when youth would complete four of the five tests and get a job and then never complete the GED. Consequently, that would affect our performance. Rafael also said that we don't want to create the illusion that our system remedies the poor wages kids will earn during their lives when they don't graduate from high school.

Motion by Dennis DiZoglio, seconded by Bob Westcott, to approve the inclusion of 14 Youth Service Elements as part of the ITA Policy as presented. Motion passed.

IV. Budget Update

Rafael said that we are on track with our budget. The only category we are overspent is personnel and that is because of the summer youth program. Youth are counted as our employees. Other categories which are underspent will catch up later in the fiscal year. We also try to spend a little less than we receive to carry some over to the next FY. The state just announced a larger deficit than the expected \$1 and 1/2 billion and we may get additional cuts. We need a reserve to ride out cuts and not have to lay off many staff when cuts happen.

As far as outreach goes, Rafael said that the public workforce system is competing with Amazon, Monster and temp agencies for job seekers and employers. The state doesn't have its past monopoly on data resources any more. He also reported that there are some new grants not yet listed in the budget and it will go up to a little less than \$8M.

V. Site RFP Update

Rafael asked Abel Vargas to give the update on the Site RFP. Abel said that they have been working on an RFP for the MVWIB/Career Center. He gave a draft provided by the MVWIB to Lawrence purchasing agent Rita Brousseau. He expects that it will be on the street within the next few days.

Rafael said that in accordance with the Mayor's wishes we have narrowed the site to within two thirds of a mile of city hall. Federal guidelines state that we cannot have a clear geographic preference and he doubts that the two thirds of a mile will work. But the City may justifiably argue that most of the people we serve face to face live in the downtown area that and the City of Lawrence has incurred significant retirement cost liability as a result of its fiscal agent role for the regional workforce development and that its economic redevelopment should be a contract criteria. The city is looking to revitalize its businesses and tax base. Rafael said that he hopes to have a chance to have a final look at the RFP before it goes out.

Juan Yopez suggested removing the geographic preference and Dennis DiZoglio suggested taking the geographic preference out and changing it to "prefer sites that will enhance and

have a positive influence on the local Lawrence economy.” That way reviewers can balance between two public goods. Rafael stated that Dennis’ suggestion was excellent.

Amy Weatherbee said that the RFP should also mention easy access to major highways and free parking as many of our clients are unemployed and can’t afford to pay for parking.

Abel said that 75 people work here and their spending will make a difference downtown. It will also create positive activity with more people coming in and out of downtown. Juan said that the selected site should be located where there is adequate parking for staff and clients. Chili said that three days a week there are career center workshop when as many as 100 people other than staff need to find parking. The workshops can last two or three hours and people will need to pay for parking during that that time. He said that parking is a big issue.

Abel said that there is value in having it downtown. We are otherwise supporting the suburbs and malls at the expense of inner cities. Rafael agreed that we should not abandon them and hoped that a downtown can be found close to sufficient, affordable parking.

Dennis said that the situation is a case of two competing and good public policies. Juan said that we will need at least 125 parking spots available for career center staff and customers. Dennis said that this may be an opportunity to encourage public transportation and Bob Westcott relayed the story of his grandson who takes public transportation from Lawrence to Haverhill to work and must leave at 9:00 a.m. to be to work at noon. Bus schedules and transfers make the trip at least 1 ½ hours long to go from Lawrence to Haverhill.

VI. Other Business

Rafael said that the Annual Meeting is at Greater Lawrence Technical High School and that we are honored to have Secretary Ron Walker as our featured speaker. Lawrence Voc is havpp to partner with us on this and other initiatives and we are also grateful to Superintendent Lavoie.

VII. 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