



## **PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, October 22, 2014**

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Ron Contrado, Juan Yopez

Members Absent: Michael Munday

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Mary Kivell, Brian Norris

Others: Arthur Chilingirian

### **I. Approval of Minutes of September 22, 2014**

A quorum being present Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 7:40 a.m. and called for a motion on the minutes of the September 22, 2014 meeting.

**Motion by Ron Contrado, seconded by Juan Yopez, to approve the minutes of the September 22, 2014 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

### **II. WIOA Changes**

Rafael Abislaiman introduced Brian Norris as the new Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) Director/Marketing Manager. Brian will be in charge of fostering manufacturing in four Northeast Massachusetts WIB regions. We are using WIA money as an ITA match and are likely to do so with WIOA funds.

Rafael distributed a handout which recaps Board-related WIOA changes. Old JTPA region designations were retained under WIA and that may or may not happen again under WIOA. There may be WIB consolidations to reduce the number of this State's WIBs because Massachusetts has sixteen (16) WIBS and in some states one WIB is the size of the state of Massachusetts. If consolidation were to happen it would occur about two years from now.

Our regional funding was at a high of \$11m three or four years ago and is now at \$7-8m but there is talk of WIOA costing tens of millions of dollars more nationwide. One area of controversy is the mandate to work both with the hardest to serve and with

people with disabilities. Additional funding is unlikely to match this mandate. In Massachusetts both Title I and Title II has often been dedicated to the hardest to serve but it is different in other states. Elsewhere the Title II portion of WIA provides most of the academic remediation and ESL; Title I is more focused on job training.

Rafael said that if we focus on the hardest to serve it becomes much more difficult to help employers become more competitive. We are also shutting out people who need less help to get back into the workforce.

He stated that we should focus more of our efforts on helping the hardest to serve when unemployment is low. But when unemployment is high focusing on them delays both employment and economic growth because employers can't get the people they need to grow and unemployed people who need only a little assistance to get back into the workforce may not get that assistance and thus stay unemployed.

Peter Matthews cited the example of his credit union and the inability to hire someone who cannot pass a CORI because they cannot be insured. The discussion should be around those most likely to be employed and matching employers' needs with very little money. Peter said that our objective is to get people working. Rafael added that if people think they will always have second, third or more chances, they may not be motivated to perform well when they do get a job.

Peter Matthews asked if there would be changes as a result governor's race and if it will affect regional consolidation. Ralph said that it may change more under Baker than Coakley. He said that Barker's website mentions matching WIB regions with community college regions. That would not be a significant change. Rafael said that the MVWIB may survive even if the Governor decides to cut the number of regions by half statewide. Other WIBs are smaller and serve smaller numbers of people.

Peter wondered if we would be matched with the MVEDC. Rafael said that it's possible. Massachusetts has 14 State economic development regions and there are 8 federal economic development regions. Juan Yopez mentioned that the closest WIB is Lowell.

Rafael said that we need to protect our WIB because we make a difference for poor people. He cited the example of New York State and their WIA implementation being different from Massachusetts. Everyone in NY is a WIA customer and in Mass fewer than 10% are. In MA most of our customer falls under the Wagner Peyser category and not the WIA one. But even so, New York's and Massachusetts' aggregate success rates are not that much different.

The current WIA system has remarkable flexibility, not always for the good, and WIOA may be the same. For example, New York just reinstated their state WIB this year after it was inoperative for more than a decade. It was inoperative although Federal law

mandates that it be operating. Weak WIBs mean that government bureaucrats have more authority.

Rafael then said that Joe Bevilacqua has done an admirable job of holding the MVWIB together for a number of years but the state WIB has been a shell. That situation was fostered by paid State staff. He said it would be good to get a strong group of employers to help guide WIB activities at the State level.

Rafael continued by his update on WIOA Board changes. WIOA requires the membership of a joint labor – management partnership representative. It must also include standing committees that focus on the Career Center, Youth Services, and individuals with disabilities. A Youth Council is no longer required but we may want to use the existing one as members of a Youth Services committee. He said that some of the non-voting members are folks with experience with disabilities and we could perhaps spin some off into a committee for Individuals with Disabilities.

Peter Matthews asked when WOIA becomes effective and Rafael said June 1, 2016. Peter also said that the committee for individuals with disabilities is pretty clear and we should move on that quickly.

Rafael said that, with the new appointments, our current board membership number is now 48. At the annual meeting the board will elect the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Clerk. He said that we have a multitude of checks and balances in our fiscal system and a very competent fiscal staff. He said the Bob Westcott has agreed to serve as Treasurer if elected and that Ann Ormand has agreed to nominate Peter as Chairman with Juan Yopez as Vice Chair and Planning Committee Chair and Anne Ormond as Clerk.

Rafael said that Joe Bevilacqua has a lot to be proud of as Lawrence is in second place in the state for the Gateway City with the most economic development and that Joe was instrumental in helping Sal Lupoli develop Riverwalk. Rafael also said that he is very grateful to Peter Matthews, Juan Yopez and all members of the board for their support.

### **III. Update on the 'Referrals to Higher Education' Meeting with DCS**

Rafael reported on a recent meeting the Mayor had with the Regional WIA Administrator (Holly O'Brien) plus four members of her staff and Alice Sweeney from DCS on the issue of facilitating career center customer enrollment at the community college. They are sticking to their guns and insist that what Mayor Rivera wants to do is illegal. Rafael disagrees but stated that it would be illegal to insist that all WIA customers enroll in NECC.

We are not asking for that. All career center clients participate in a career center orientation seminar regarding available services. We want to mention community

colleges in that context and provide people with a way to get more job training information from the college. The Feds and State feel that it is preferential and against WIA customer choice. We think that it is ok because most of the participants will never be eligible for WIA services. We are providing them with a way to use unemployment as a way to prepare themselves for a better job. Information gathered would be shared with a variety of public colleges, as this committee agreed, and that only when a Career Center customer agrees to being contacted by a public college.

But state and federal administrators feel this is wrong. Rafael said that he would like to negotiate with them to see how it can be made possible. Mayor Rivera justifiably feels that the amount of WIA dollars is not commensurate with the need in Lawrence so why not get more resources to address that need.

DCS and the Federal Administrators stated that even public colleges just want the money. The wrong people will incur debt because many of them are not ready to be engaged in a college education. Peter Matthews said that it is a little late to be worrying about student loan debt with the total debt today. People are starting to get it now. The Mayor says that if we don't do this now then the old way and problems will be the new way and problems as has happened in the past.

Chili said that his career center orientation seminar uses a slide to inform clients of the opportunity to meet with the Navigator if they are interested in college. Customers are put on a list and referred to the Navigator in our career center who meets with them and talks about schools. He said that the state's concern is that the slide only mentions NECC but Chili said that the Navigator explains why college is important and mentions NECC and Middlesex locally as well as others and WIA.

Chili said that the Mayor wants 100 referrals for every 3,000 the career center sees. Chili said that he is already at 48. He said that we can do interagency agreements to share information with colleges and that the Federal and State issue is that we may only do that with one school.

Juan said that, as he suggested at the last meeting, the career center could incorporate a slide with how much is earned per level of education. He also said that if the state and federal administrators feel our approach is wrong then perhaps we should look at a different avenue.

Chili referenced a past complaint from a vendor about how another training vendor was getting all the referrals. We require clients to look at a minimum of two vendors and if there are three to look at all of them. The complaint was resolved because a DCS attorney saw that the Career Center was using correct procedures.

Juan asked how we can find a way to have the State and Feds agree. Rafael said that we will look for agreement in the months ahead. No one will be forced to go anywhere

at our level. We already have a federally funded NECC employee in our facility. Every community college that wants a navigator can have one. In Lawrence the navigator is a NECC employee and in Lowell the person is employed by Middlesex Community College.

Peter Matthews mentioned a recent job training partnership with NECC. Chili said that NECC partnered with Whittier for machinist training and with Greater Lawrence on electronics. He said the career center had flyers on the table and if clients were interested they could see a career center counselor who screened them and referred them to the program when appropriate. Ralph said that the colleges and voke schools are taking turns providing classes in three regions for two years. It is a case study in problems with workforce development partnerships. Colleges are doing the academic training and the vocational schools the technical training but there is often misunderstanding between all of the entities involved. The problem is aggravated because the associated funding is so low.

Rafael said the partnership received \$600,000 for four WIBs to foster training at three community colleges and about six vocational schools. Success outcomes are still a work in progress but Brian Norris has been helpful in getting people jobs. Brian said that he has two different roles. One is getting manufacturers to join the consortium by stating that we can get them employees. The other is helping unemployed people connect with jobs. Trained people are a good selling tool but he is sometimes frustrated because colleges and vokes try to keep him out of their established employer networks. The vocational schools have their club of companies they work with and are afraid to let him know who they are. Ralph said that this region's program was run in the summer when vocational staff were mostly on vacation so in one case enrolled students have had difficulties getting jobs.

#### **IV. Other Business**

Chili reported that Polartec is laying off 70 and putting 60 on a shortened week. They will be called back in the end of December. Rafael said that this has been recurring issue at Polartec for many years. Rafael added that there were 130 people laid off at Yoplait and also a lay off at Micro Semi.

#### **V. 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