



## **Planning and Career Center Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, February 21, 2017**

8:00 a.m.

255 Essex Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

Lawrence, MA 01840

Members Present: Juan Yepez, Chairman  
Ron Contrado, Andrew Herlihy, Bob Wescott, Rosalin Acosta, Abel Vargas

Members Absent: Mike Munday

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Susan Almono, Corina Ruiz

Others: Amy Weatherbee

### **I. Approval of Minutes of January 17, 2017**

A quorum being present, Juan Yepez, called the meeting to order at 8:15 a.m. and then called for a motion on the minutes of the January 17, 2017 meeting.

**Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by Rosalin Acosta, to approve the minutes of the January 17, 2017 meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

### **II. Performance Summary as of January 31, 2017**

Rafael asked if there were any questions. Bob asked if the unemployment rate affects our funding, it being at 3.1% for our region. Rafael stated that it does affect funding and explained that the unemployment rate is calculated by the number of people on UI and the number looking for work. It may not be entirely accurate. Abel added that the unemployment rate has always been calculated that way so it can still be compared to what was published ten years ago. Last year, Rafael said, there was a 15% state-wide cut in funding because unemployment went down. This year we anticipate another 10% cut. Some early figures show that Lawrence and Lowell's unemployment dropped a lot so we are likely to get larger cuts than other regions in the state.

Juan asked what happened to the seven state employees discussed in past meetings. Rafael said they are gone because of the state wide cuts. The career center is understaffed for a number of reasons. Amy added that they are significantly understaffed. Part of the cause is because of the OSCC RFP. Some people have refused employment because of the uncertainty of the OSCC operator and because of cuts made by the State.

State and Federal staffing cuts are also impacting the system. The MVWIB submitted a National Emergency Grant (NEG) last year and a NEG modification around the same time but we have yet to receive notice on either. Juan asked how long it takes and Amy said that a response usually takes 60 days. Juan asked if the decision comes from Washington. Rafael said yes. Washington also decides how much less MA will get than states with higher unemployment rates. Amy added that besides the unfilled staff positions, DCS staffing was reduced by seven employees in January. They staffed the resource room and provided employment counseling.

Rafael said that historically the state has provide roughly a third of the total budget and now it's 1/5 to 1/4. The State made the cuts because their Federal funding was reduced. Bob asked how many full time employees there are now. Amy said 28-30 staff under the DTD budget and 12 for DCS. Juan asked how many unfilled positions there are. Amy said she could post an additional five positions. She has so far hired a subcontractor and may need to bring another subcontractor on to conduct workshops.

Rosalin asked how client flow has been at the career center. Amy said that because we have the RESEA program and require customers collecting unemployment to visit the career center, they see an average of 200 new customers a week. About 200 come in weekly to do the career center seminar and workshop and, of those, about 160 have to come back within a week to meet with staff. Our single customer flow is significant. On average, in FY16, customers visited the career center between 4.5 to 5.5 times on average; totaling over 43,000 visits. Amy said that between 50-60% of our customers are dislocated workers and not tied to area residency.

The customers that visit the unemployment navigation area, that are being serviced by DUA staff, don't necessarily have to be career center customers and are not included in the 43K visits. We document the visits but they are not counted in our services. In our OSCAR report we count where their point of service is. Rafael asked how much the number would increase if they were counted. Amy said she gets a weekly and monthly report from the state that she will share with him. Rafael said we need to find a way to count partner services since they are an integral parts of WIOA.

Rosalin wondered if the volume is going to be more from Lawrence than anything else. Amy said we will be able to track it. We have seen some challenges with new customers and we are working out solutions to inform people who haven't been here before. The VWCC website and all other materials strongly encourage customers to park in the Museum Square or Buckley garage. The initial customer visit may not get our messages and unfortunately, because of the customer flow, call outs can't be done.

In late January, VWCC held a career center seminar in Haverhill for 25 profiled customers; that site cannot be supported much longer with current funding. Rafael said he agrees with Amy but customer numbers may increase in Haverhill due to parking issues at the new site. He asked if there has been an increase in the last few weeks. Amy said that prior to January Haverhill did not offer career center seminars. She was able to get a standing room with the College and contract a person to do the seminar because she does not have the staff to do so.

Juan asked if there is a plan for signage in the new building. Amy said she doesn't feel comfortable investing taxpayer's money in signage until there is a decision on the OSCC operator. Juan asked if

we have a signed lease with the Haverhill site and if notice needs to be given prior to leaving. Amy said the lease agreement expires in June 30, 2017. Rafael added that the license agreement ends annually and there's at least a 60 day to half year notice window. Everyone involved knows about Haverhill site issues because they were mentioned in the OSCC RFP.

Abel noted that the employer services numbers stand out. He asked if people are finding so much value that we are exceeding plan numbers. Rafael said that it is a definition issue; the state had one definition when we developed our plan and the definition changed after that. Amy added that the total employers served is a repeat number. The state made a changed to enhanced services; that number is a pretty good marker that we are providing valuable service. Abel asked if the Dislocated Worker total number of participants and new participants say anything about the labor market. Amy said that is a direct result of some of the major dislocations we've had, such as Polartec.

Bob questioned if a negative exit means customer completed training but did not get employment or that they did not complete the training. Rafael said either/or or both.

### **III. Budget Update as of January 31, 2017**

Rafael said there are significant dollar accrual numbers related to manufacturing training and new site development. We have multi-year contracts where sometimes trainings are scheduled one year but happen the next. We also have some building costs indicated in the vendor service fee category. We have to accrue expenses if second year WIOA funding is not spent. There are still some questions on how much the municipal budget will cover site development. New money is not being used on the new site. A request was made to DCS to allow us to spend current allocations on the new site and they said no; we will have to use the money accumulated over decades. Rosalin asked if there is a plan to get reimbursed. Rafael said we will be reimbursed for rent spent at Heritage Place but doesn't know how much we will ultimately pay for new site development. We also checked the Heritage Place lease to see if there was a deposit made back about eighteen years ago and there wasn't.

Abel said that for the first five months of this year not rent payment will be due to the City. The City will spread \$65,000 what MVWIB/VWCC invested over an additional 18 months of reduced rate rent. After that the full license rent rate will be \$11.82 ft<sup>2</sup>. That rate will not be paid until year 2. Rafael added that new staff will have to cover their own parking costs. Overall we will be saving about \$60,000 a year from what we paid at Heritage Place.

### **IV. Career Center Report**

Career Center Executive Director, Amy, said the move went well; they shut down for four days. She cannot commend the VWCC staff enough for all their hard work. We had a few hiccups due to the elevator but the movers are coming back tomorrow to finish moving some things. The cubicles are in; they are missing the side panels with windows but that should be done by Saturday so we can be done with that contract. We were very pleased with the refurbished cubicles which were the least expensive bid. Staples got the bid but Office Environment did the work.

We are still working on window issues. Tint Kings frosted all the windows in the testing room and computer lab and first floor so you cannot see in from outside. It was about 12 windows and the

cost was \$2,800. Now that we are settled we will get quotes for tinting additional windows. Rafael added that it may be cheaper than blinds but we might have to do a combination of the two.

Amy said there were several state proposals recently submitted and VWCC submitted letters of support for the WCTF manufacturing, healthcare and ex-offender construction laborer proposals. Rafael said Susan Almono prepared the ex-offender proposal on behalf of the MVWIB. A positive outcome is questionable because so many people are applying. Susan said the MVWIB received two small grants; \$10,000 for Amp-it-UP geared towards manufacturing marketing and \$18,000 for Connecting Activities STEM work site experiences for youth. Susan is preparing another proposal for the renewal of the EPA grant with support of the current MVWIB STTEP program. Amy added that they received notification of an award of \$5,000 from the Robert A. Mills foundation to work with Everett Mills. This money will be used to go out to Hamden County for 2-3 days and study their robust program recognized by DOL.

Rafael added that we have one of the best manufacturing programs in the state and manufacturing-related training money keeps coming in. NAMC has a new \$200,000 grant from Economic Development that has to be fully expended by the end of June. Most of that grant's manufacturing training will be done at Bunkerhill Community College. We have a new program at Mount Washusett Community College and both quality assurances and manufacturing-related classes will take place in this area. Andrew and Abel said there's a lot of good things happening and it may be a good idea to get a full picture on paper of all the workforce development initiatives that are taking place.

Amy said they are still waiting to hear back from the state about the safety proposal submitted. That will help us with stairwell security, get a swipe card system and possible cameras for the safety and security of our staff.

#### **V. Transfer \$30,000 from WIOA Adult ITA funding to WIOA Dislocated Worker ITA funding**

Rafael said that as usual we do better engaging dislocated worker category people for training than we do adult category people. Adult category people always encounter difficulty meeting our academic requirements or finding transportation or being interested in full-time work. We are looking to transfer \$30,000 from the adult category to the dislocated worker to train more people. Rafael gave the example of Polartec employees who were making \$21/hr without knowing English. They count as dislocated worker. Andrew asked if Polartec has a NEG and Amy said yes, they are TRADE certified. Amy said it's a balancing act between Adult and Dislocated funding to make sure that both are utilized by the end of the year.

Andrew brought up the concern of going in the wrong direction by not serving more Adult category people. He doesn't think it's now primarily an unemployment problem but instead a labor participation problem. There's a lot of work and job openings. Employing dislocated workers is not a concern. The concern is the adult category. In Haverhill there are job openings and yet they see jobless people just hanging around.

Rafael said that some people working part-time jobs don't want full time ones so as not to lose their benefits. Amy said she has a staff who visits the DTA office on a weekly basis to cultivate relationships. Rosalin added that daycare is a huge problem; there are more social issues that prohibits full labor participation. Bob asked if there is a way to quantify information and share with

legislators. He continued by saying that this has been an ongoing issue for 30-40 years. Amy said TAFD made changes and VWCC will be hosting an event with DTA staff to explain the benefit changes. Rosalin said that is a great idea and that the Board would benefit from learning about it as well. Abel outlined the Mayor's clean Lawrence effort and how past participants are eager for the program to start again so that they can work. There might be an opportunity to leverage this program for adult category funding.

Rafael talked about the challenge of helping people who are already in the system. There are many people collecting social security under the disability category apart from the age category. Some worked before 2008 but are now old enough to retire. How much should we help those people re-enter the workforce at minimum wage jobs. How do we prioritize them when there are younger people who have yet to work.

Amy said they now have a dedicated business recruitment room because since December, there's been an 18% increase in recruitments onsite by employers; they are desperate for people. It is now a talent market. Susan added that there is a study available on the cliff effect of getting off public assistance. She will share it at the next meeting.

Ron asked if there are any efforts being made to help ex-offenders who cannot get a job. Rosalin said UTEC in Lowell has a great program that works with ex-offenders. They provide them employment for two years; one of their businesses is here in Lawrence. Another project UTEC just received is a contract with Whole Foods to make cutting boards. They keep coming up with creative business ideas to get newly released ex-offenders jobs. Abel added that Lawrence has three similar programs that work with troubled youth. Amy said the administration came up with a report "The Chronically Unemployed" highlighting young African American men, people of color and individuals with CORI issues. Rafael added that the MVWIB has a successful heavy equipment operator training program with the teamsters and the teamsters won't accept participants that don't have a clean CORI. But the MVWIB recently proposed ex-incarcerated job training to CommCorp and we are waiting for their response. Susan added that the first heavy equipment training cohort had six graduates, of those, five are working as truck drivers and their wages are between \$18-25/hr.

**Juan Yopez asked for a motion to approve the transfer of \$30,000 from WIOA Adult ITA funding to WIOA Dislocated Worker ITA funding. Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by Rosalin Acosta, to approve the transfer of \$30,000 from WIOA Adult ITA funding to WIOA Dislocated Worker ITA funding. Motion passed.**

## **VI. WIOA Update**

Rafael mentioned that there is a growing emphasis on super regions. The word is that they won't affect the current 16 WIB distribution but ultimately it may affect them.

Rosalin asked about Mary Kivell. Rafael said she retired and is now in Florida. We hope to invite her to a quarterly board meeting so everyone gets a chance to say goodbye. Juan asked if the WIB is looking for a replacement and Rafael said yes but reorganization may impact the hire date.

Andrew suggested adding a placeholder on the agenda for grants update.

Juan asked when the next quarterly meeting is and Rafael said mid-March. It should have happened in January but because of the move and CC RFP, it was postponed.

**VII. Other Business/ Tour of new site**

There was no other business.

**VIII. Adjourn**

**Having no further business Rosalin Acosta made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Abel Vargas, and the meeting was adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Corina Ruiz*

Recorder