



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

8:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01840

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Michael Sweeney, Charles LoPiano,
Robert LeBlanc, Karen Sawyer

Members Absent: Pedro Arce, Mike Lynch, Shirley Callan,
Sal Lupoli

Staff Present: Fred Carberry, Betty Kirk, Augustine Ambe

Guests Present: Joseph Bevilacqua, Amy Weatherbee

1. Approval of Minutes of 11/19/08

Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. and called for a motion to approve the minutes of the 11/19/08 meeting.

Motion by Mike Sweeney seconded by Karen Sawyer to approve the minutes of the November 19, 2008 meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

2. FY'09 2nd Quarter Performance

Betty Kirk gave the second quarter performance report stating that we should be at 50% of plan but are currently well above plan in almost every area. UI is at 68% of plan and the number of veterans served is 73% with total entered employments at 48%.

Robert LeBlanc asked about recurring and repeat clients and how that is defined.

Betty said that the characteristics we are using are tracked by the career center and 50% of the use is UI claimants.

MVWIB Chairman Joseph Bevilacqua said that he wanted to stop by the meeting to show his support to this committee. He said that he has asked Peter Matthews to stay on as Chairman and welcomed Atty. Robert LeBlanc to the

committee. Joe mentioned that the numbers at the career center keep growing and growing and the work of this committee is critically important. He also commended Fred Carberry mentioning that this WIB has been selected to present at the NAWB Conference in Washington, DC which is evidence that real results take place here.

Betty continued the characteristics stating that regional residents total 87% of people served with 10% from New Hampshire.

Under the Title I Dislocated Worker Program we are at 122% of plan with a wage retention rate of 83%.

Bob LeBlanc asked how we are handling those numbers given they are over the plan figures. Betty said that Chili has told her that the career center turns away 60 individuals per day. He is working to get two additional employees and has gotten a security guard. Fred Carberry noted that the increase in numbers since November are UI claimants and not all are enrolled in WIA funded programs.

Bob LeBlanc then said that we are reflecting higher numbers and people who have a right to services are being turned away.

Amy Weatherbee then said that the influx in UI started in November. The career center is participating in weekly teleconferences at the state level and the state is trying to move UI claimants to the call centers which they are actively promoting. They are trying to add temporary state workers to take claims. We are also tracking how many are new claimants or how many are problem resolutions. Amy said that they have instituted a sign in sheet and that the state has funded a security guard.

Joe Bevilacqua said that as Co-Chair of the state WIB he knows that every career center is overwhelmed. No one anticipated the magnitude of the problem. He said that he was asked to participate with Good Morning America in a regional job fair last week. At 5:30 a.m. two to three hundred were lined up to come in and over 2,000 showed up. The job seeker numbers are astounding all over the state. Joe said that we are hoping that something will come out of the stimulus package.

Amy said that we spent the last eight years designing a career center with blended services and it has now reverted to a UI center. The crowds don't automatically turn into career center enrollees and we also have a linguistic issue. Amy said that we may be able to get additional Wagner Peyser funds to provide services.

Mike Sweeney said that Amy and Chili do a good job of keeping the Mayor's office informed of the career center numbers and we have conveyed to the state

our needs not just for Lawrence but throughout the Merrimack Valley. Joe Bevilacqua has also been useful in getting our message to the state.

Joe said that Massachusetts has very generous UI benefits and prior legislation did not require that you work here to collect. The state is working on correcting this loop hole but Joe said that he doesn't know if we have hit bottom yet. Our goal is to put people back to work through training and education. Right now people are just looking for their UI checks.

Peter Matthews asked if there is something this committee can do.

Fred Carberry said that if the economic bill is passed by Congress we may be able to increase the level of staffing and training programs. He also said that UI benefits will be extended through the end of the calendar year. Hopefully, the house bill will be approved and go to the Senate.

Joe Bevilacqua said that the High Performing WIB Initiative that the state administration wants all boards to achieve is aimed at getting all boards at the top and ready to serve the people. Fred Carberry noted that Secretary Bump came here to our career center to refine that message. Career center directors throughout the state came to hear this message. This is the only career center to host this event.

Betty Kirk said that a major priority of the High Performing WIB Initiative is closing the skill gap. Companies have openings they can't fill and there are people out of work. Our main focus is identifying where the jobs are and what skills are needed.

Joe Bevilacqua said that there are health care jobs that can't be filled. The Governor has simply stated that we have a number of people out of work and a number of unfilled jobs. Why can't we put that together?

Peter Matthews said that if there are any special areas that need our support or assistance we are available to help. We can contact area legislators or write letters of support as needed. He also wondered if we need to meet more often.

Mike Sweeney said that state and local government will also be having significant lay-offs which may make lobbying state officials not to touch programs difficult.

Fred Carberry said that if we need to meet for a particular purpose, he appreciates his willingness to convene a meeting.

Betty then reported on Title I Adult stating that we are 71% of plan with an average exit wage of \$11.44 and 66% of participants are basic skills deficient.

Bob LeBlanc said that the performance information is very informative but what he wants to know is what are we doing right and what can we do better?

Fred said that there is a lot that can be said by Chili in response to servicing the people who come through the doors. Fred said that more can be done to engage people and get the numbers of unemployed to participate in programs. He said that he is working with Chili to get more people enrolled.

Bob LeBlanc wondered why we can't match people with jobs. We need to know more about the people on UI.

Fred said that Bob is right but another piece that is not well documented is the needs of the private sector. We have been making progress this past year determining the specific needs for jobs. For example, 20% of the jobs in the Merrimack Valley are in manufacturing that require specific skills. We need to do a better job matching specific needs and specific skills to get people into jobs.

Mike Sweeney said that part of what Bob is asking is what are we trying to do with the High Performing WIB to look at skill sets and gaps so we open jobs and match people to employers. The transition has begun and we have started to address this issue.

Betty Kirk also said that Chili wants to start workshops to show people that they have transferable skills.

Amy noted that there are regulations that limit funding availability for training. She also said that most dislocated workers are impacted by trade and what types of training funds are available.

Betty then reported on Title I Youth performance which is at 61% of plan with an average exit wage of \$10.44. Under characteristics Betty said that 15% are male and 85% female which has been an ongoing discussion at the Youth Council regarding programs that will be attractive to males. She also noted that 76% of the youth are basic skills deficient and as such are the hardest to serve.

The Lucent/Alcatel NEG is at 113% of plan with 192 enrollees and 64 in training with an average wage at placement of \$19.46 which is 77% wage retention. Betty said that this was expected due to the level of salaries at Lucent.

3. Update on High Performing WIB Initiative

Fred Carberry reported we are continuing to work with the consultant Barbara Zeimetz preparing the strategic plan and it is coming near completion. We need to assemble certain elements. A letter of intent has been sent to Secretary Bump and the submission deadline is March 2, 2009. We are hopeful of having a draft for the February 6th board meeting for the board to review and vote to

move forward. Fred said that we had good participation in focus groups in the various sectors.

4. Update on UI Services being performed at ValleyWorks Career Center

Betty Kirk reported that Career Center Director Arthur Chilingirian had another commitment and could not be here today. Betty said that he would be best able to discuss the UI services at the Career Center and is working on statistics that he will be able to present at the next meeting.

5. Update on Other Initiatives

- **Green Jobs Grant**

Betty said that the Green Jobs Grant comes out of a Pathways out of Poverty grant. She said that we met with LARE and six other green job companies such as Sun Motor Group and Olympic Engineering. Fred Carberry explained that American Training is the lead applicant. Chick LoPiano said that they have sent an idea and budget to American Training to expand their weatherization program which will create jobs. Fred said he thinks we will have a good application going in and is hopeful we will receive funding.

- **Ex-Offenders Re-Entry Grant**

Betty Kirk said that the application for this grant has gone in. The intent is to develop strategies to help develop services for ex-offenders to help prevent recidivism. Fred said that even if we are not funded we intend to continue to bring together the parties that participated.

- **Older Worker Retention Grant**

We are working to develop a strategic plan to help companies hold on to older workers over a variety of industries. We have surveyed manufacturing company's employees and management and will be compiling results in the near future.

Fred explained that there is an additional Older Worker Grant being funded by the DOL and we are collaborating with Operation ABLE on this grant. Only ten to thirteen will be awarded nationally.

Peter Matthews wondered if it includes part-time employees as many employers will be looking for a pool of potential part-time workers in this economy. He said it would be good if we could make employers know that they can turn to the WIB as a resource.

- **Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund**

Augustine Ambe said that this grant is on track with the timeline and spending plan. We are still collecting data and there are three programs running. He expects that by June training funds will be exhausted and we will have attained all our goals. One thing he noted was that it is sometimes difficult to match the

employer needs in crafting the training programs if the employer has very specific needs.

6. Youth Summit

Fred Carberry reported that the state is sponsoring a regional Youth Summit which will be hosted by the North Shore, Merrimack Valley, and Lowell WIBs. This is being planned for March 19th at Merrimack College for a ½ day or 5 hour event. Andrew Sum from Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies will present a new set of youth labor market statistics. Dr. Champagne of Merrimack College will be on the introductory program.

7. Adjourn

Having no further business Mike Sweeney made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Chick LoPiano. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Recorder