



## PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

**Thursday, May 17 2012**

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Ron Contrado, Juan Yopez Kevin Page, Fred Carberry

Members Absent: Peter Matthews, Atty. Robert Leblanc, Michael Munday, Joseph Bevilacqua

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Barbara Zeimetz, Mary Kivell

Guests Present: Arthur Chilingirian, Dawn Beati

### **I. Approval of Minutes of April 18, 2012**

Fred Carberry called the meeting to order at 7:40 a.m. in the absence of committee chairman Peter Matthews who had a business conflict. Fred then called for a motion on the minutes of February 15, 2012 meeting.

**Motion by Ron Contrado seconded by Juan Yopez to approve the minutes of the April 18, 2012 Planning Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

### **II. Preliminary Discussion of FY'13 Allocations**

Executive Director Rafael Abislaiman passed a sheet on regional WIA allocations and stated that as best we can tell, next year there will be a 10% reduction in funding compared to last year. He said that Secretary Goldstein also indicated that this year a minimum of 30% needs to go to training. He said that this may require some personnel changes.

Arthur Chilingirian (Chili) said that the House and Senate State budgets don't favor us. Chili also said that the one stop item for career centers includes a line item for DCS oversight. At their recent association meeting, they spoke with former state representative Dan Bosley who is going to lobby to change that requirement. Chili that he saw that funding for Community Colleges is in the budget but Youth Works is cut to \$3m from \$6m this year. He said that the DCS line item for oversight reduces career center One Stop budgets. He also explained that the State's three competitive one stops get the biggest chunk of the money.

Barbara said that when the state was considering privatizing the one stops Boston, Cambridge, and Springfield received a line item for infrastructure. Efforts have been made for fifteen years to try and change that to no avail.

Rafael said that the state had significant cuts last year but had carry-in money. This year, there will be a lot less carry-in so there situation is more difficult. There have already been layoffs and they now are offering early retirements as a way to make cuts. Chili said that he learned that several employees put in for the state early retirement package but were refused as it would severely impact services. Chili also spoke about the DTA funding possibly being moved back to EOLWD.

Rafael explained that three years ago the state transferred DTA training funding to nonprofits which have not performed well, in part through inexperience and in part because of the bad economy. Chili said at that time our regional DTA funding went from \$1m down to \$100,000. Rafael said that the career center has so far weathered the cuts partly because of NEG funding which allowed people to be shifted over to that budget category and partly because we reduced the amount of money available for training. But we cannot continue to cut training dollars and can't count on continued NEGs so it is difficult to gauge how best to deal with future cuts.

Rafael said that things may not move until after the November elections but that there are Democrat and Republican versions of bills on WIA reauthorization. The Democratic plan is a significant departure with more business representation and calls for increasing the WIB role and decreasing the role of the CEO. The republican version replaces WIA and WIBs with other unnamed entities that require greater private sector participation and a larger training component.

Barbara Zeimetz said that the original 1998 WIA legislation has never been reauthorized since they can't reach resolution. She said that nothing will happen until the summer of 2013 at the earliest. Chili also mentioned the Ryan bill which aims to cut the deficit and would result in major cuts. Ralph said that Ryan's plan basically reduces the rate of governmental growth but that it could wipe out whole programs like WIA.

Juan Yepez wondered if we are looking at layoffs and Rafael said not so much this year but if we have to make personnel cuts it will be two to four people. Ron Contrado mentioned that Bernanke is talking about bringing back QE3. Discussion followed on the state of the economy in the world which could impact the United States.

Fred Carberry asked if these were the preliminary numbers or pretty much what it will be. Barbara Zeimetz said these figures are pretty much what it is. Rafael said that it does seem unfair since we have the fourth biggest caseload in the state but the eight smallest budget . Chili then said that reason is due to the grant formulas. Barbara said that we can speak with the Secretary and see if we can get any change but she said that the formulas are run in four areas although the rate for UI doesn't seem to be correct.

Fred Carberry then asked if we aren't looking at layoffs. Ralph said that we might make reductions through attrition or reduced hours. Chili said that even if a person is laid off ValleyWorks still needs to serve 15,000 as the numbers are consistent. He said that taking people

away how can we continue to provide the same level of services? Fred mentioned his experience in the private sector and utilizing part time employees who are not eligible for the same fringe benefits as full time. Barbara Zeimetz said that in the public sector we are punished for doing more with less through reduced funding. In the private sector the company gains a profit whereas we just lose funding. Fred then said that we need to continue to be creative in providing services.

### **III. Update on WIB Youth Workforce Program Manager Job Applicants**

Rafael Abislaiman said that we received eighteen resumes and we hope to be conducting interviews next Monday and Tuesday for four to six candidates. Hopefully we will reach a decision by the end of next week. The position has been vacant for six months and we have a \$30,000 savings. We are seeking a candidate with a variety of skills including grant writing. It is the consensus of the Youth Council and staff that we need a Youth Workforce Program Manager. Chili wondered if, in light of the budget, we might factor in a part time employed Youth Manager. Barbara Zeimetz said that we need full-time capacity here.

### **IV. Information on the new state EUC/REA – Emergency Unemployment Compensation/ Re-employment Eligibility Assessment Program**

Arthur Chilingirian said that he would explain the grant and Dawn Beati, DCS Program Manager would explain how it will work. Chili said that this grant is a national grant from USDOL for UI claimants on extension and was supposed to be implemented March 23<sup>rd</sup>. He said that only Texas and New Hampshire have implemented it to date but that we would be sending letters Saturday to start next week. He distributed a related handout.

Chili continued stating that the intent is to provide reemployment services and reemployment and eligibility assessment to individuals who begin receiving Emergency Unemployment Compensation (extension of UI benefits) in the first tier (after 26 weeks) or who transfer to the second tier benefits on or after March 23, 2012. This federal mandate believes in providing reemployment assistance to those who are unemployed and can result in more rapid reemployment, shorter claim durations and fewer erroneous payments of unemployment compensation.

This act reinforces the requirement that unemployed individuals be able to work, available to work, and be actively seeking work. Actively seeking work is defined to include career center registration, and an appropriate search for work record.

The reemployment services and in-person reemployment and eligibility assessments mandated by the state are: 1.) the provision of labor market and career information; 2.) an assessment of the skills of the individuals; 3.) orientation to the services available through the One Stop Center established under Title I of WIA; and 4.) a review of the eligibility of the individual for EUC relating to the job search activities of the individual.

Chili mentioned that he and Dawn served on the state committee tasked with RES/REA implementation and the state has made the following additional services optional for the program: 1.) comprehensive and specialized assessments; 2.) individual and group career counseling; 3.) training services (the Department has interpreted this to mean referrals to appropriate training); 4.) additional reemployment services; and 5.) job search counseling and the development or review of an individual reemployment plan that includes participation in job search activities and appropriate workshops.

Chili said that the state has received \$12,947,106 and the Lower Merrimack Valley received \$1,459,395 (the highest in the state based on the number of UI claimants) to provide EUC services to 10,460 customers. The majority of the program is performance based and we will receive \$85 for each EUC customer who attains their goal. Dawn Beati said that we will begin sending letters this week and expect the last letters to go out in December and finish up in February. She said that we need to send out 16,000 letters to serve 10,460 customers. Dawn noted that these services must be administered in person. The proposed transition to online call centers has been put on the back burner. Our goal is for orientation for 400 additional seats in Lawrence and Haverhill each week. In addition the RES program has 7,114 and REA 1,581 receiving reemployment assistance. In March we met our numbers for REA.

We will be responsible for reaching out to customers, seeing that they go to orientation, attend workshops and complete a Career Action Plan. The state is hiring 45 seasonal part-time Job Specialist II which is entry level for a total of 950 hours per calendar year. We hope to get four for Lawrence and Haverhill. Juan Yopez wondered how long we would have them and Dawn said maybe for a year. Based on when they start, they can only work 950 hours per calendar year so she can adjust their schedules based on the number of hours. Customers will have three weeks to come in for orientation. If they fail to respond the UI claimant will not receive one week's UI benefit and if they fail to attend the workshop and complete their Career Action Plan they will have their UI benefits suspended. Dawn distributed copies of the forms which will be handed out at the workshop and completed during the workshop. Staff will provide triage which will consist of: 1.) scheduling the needed workshops; 2.) discussion on identified barriers to employment and identify recommended services; 3.) reminder of JobQuest registration; 4.) assist in identifying LMI Research method; 5) schedule REA review date and time; 6.) obtain claimants signature and provide copy of A/CAP. Rafael advised committee members to keep in mind that other, more current customers will simultaneously be using career center services. So we will be working people obliged to come to the center who may have less than adequate motivation as well as other people who really want to look for and find a job. He stated that REA/RES should probably have been in-place months ago to roll back the unemployment numbers.

Dawn said that she would be receiving crystal report every Monday and generating letters. The only exception is for those who report to a union hall every day but the exception cannot be done locally. Barbara Zeimetz said that there will be a lot of unhappy people coming in if their benefits are stopped. Dawn then referenced a chart she uses to keep on track with the project and said that there are a couple of unresolved issues such as data entry. She said that staff is on board and they will have 280 seats in Lawrence and 120 in Haverhill for orientation. She also said that the state is providing documents in Spanish. Chili said that we are hoping to engage folks and once they complete the process and are counted we will receive \$85 per customer. Chili also said that the plan is to push EUC into workshops when they come in to prevent a log jam. Dawn said that UI staff will be rotating as facilitator one day, triage the next, review, the next and UI claims and are excited to be doing different tasks.

## **V. Adjourn**

**Having no further business Juan Yopez made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Ron Contrado. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell*, Recorder