



PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

7:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Lawrence, MA 01843

Members Present: Peter Matthews, Fred Carberry, Rosemary Chandler, Kevin Page, Juan Yopez

Members Absent: Ron Contrado, Michael Munday, Atty. Robert Leblanc, Joseph Bevilacqua

Staff Present: Rafael Abislaiman, Odanis Hernandez, Deborah Andrews, Susan Almono, Mary Kivell

Guests Present: Arthur Chilingirian

I. Approval of Minutes of May 18, 2011

A quorum being present, Peter Matthews called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. Peter then called for a motion on the minutes of the May 18, 2011 meeting.

Fred Carberry made a motion to accept the minutes of the May 18, 2011 meeting as submitted with Rosemary Chandler seconding the motion. Motion passed.

II. Legislative Update

Rafael Abislaiman said that we are waiting on the MA Senate for the State budget and then it goes to Joint Committee and then the Governor for signature. Ralph said that the federal debt ceiling is a bigger issue and if there is no agreement by the August 12th deadline we don't know what will happen.

III. Transitional Employment Program Debriefing with CommCorp

Rafael Abislaiman said this is follow-up information on the rejection of our TEP proposal by Comm Corp. Ralph went to CommCorp and reviewed the successful proposal. One reason we feel that the process was unfair was that there was a requirement to connect with a career center to screen clients and that wasn't in the proposal that was funded. We made a decision not to continue to fight but there are several issues about which we could complain. The RFP indicated that a proposal could only request \$200,000 but this region's winning proposal requested \$331,000. [CommCorp's final award to it is \$177,000.] Ralph said that Susan worked very hard on this proposal and thought there was no way to provide 'wrap around services' for 48 clients who would also receive salaries. Our proposal

was to provide electronic assembler training and jobs to for 21 youth. The winning proposal offered restaurant and daycare job training and jobs to homeless mothers.

IV. Raising LARE Pharmacy Tech Budget

Rafael said LARE has a variety of contracts FY 11 contracts and most of them have budget reductions. The reductions were negotiated between LARE and in-house with staff under the process previously approved by the Planning Committee.

There is one contract for which LARE requested additional funds totaling \$2,700. Staff recommends approving this increase because LARE did not include pharmacy technician testing and accreditation cost in their budget and it is a reasonable program related cost. The funds would come out of the LARE auto training program which is under spent.

There was a discussion about the program performance. After the discussion Rosemary Chandler said that the program is performing well. Fred Carberry asked why the auto training program is under spent and Ralph said the Greater Lawrence Technical School didn't use all of the allocated staffing funds.

Motion by Rosemary Chandler seconded by Fred Carberry to approve the increase in the LARE Pharmacy Tech budget as presented. Motion passed.

V. H1B Proposal

Ralph asked Susan Almono to report on the recently submitted H1B proposal. Susan said that we submitted this proposal to US DOL for \$3.4m to help American workers train for jobs taken by H1B visa workers. We researched this area to determine what those jobs are and we found out they are in information technology, engineering and health care. This was a large proposal that included the New Hampshire and North Shore WIBs and about twenty employers. It included other entities like NECC. The proposal will allow for about 100 \$25,000 OJTs to employers and up to \$4,000 for certificate or additional course training.

Rafael said that we had a three week turn-around from proposal release to the response due date. Susan said that DOL had another RFP for Career Innovation which they rescinded. This grant was subsequently posted and they expect to post another RFP for H1B in November. Susan and Ralph both felt that it was in our best interest to submit at this time when the number of respondents was likely to be smaller and then submit again in November if needed.

Rafael said that only two proposals were submitted from Massachusetts; Hamden County and ours. Our program focuses not on lower level training but intermediate and upper level training for hard to fill jobs that often rely on foreign workers to fill them.

We are grateful to the partners who responded to this joint venture. Susan said that the statistics from the state and the career center were helpful as well as the anecdotes from employers. Susan referenced Solectria Renewables who can't get special electrical engineers. This is an example of where an OJT for someone with an electrical engineer

degree could take a couple of courses at UMass/Lowell and would be able to fill this need.

Rafael said that the final submission was for \$3.7m over four years. It would help area professional and technical people get full time jobs. We sent out over 80 requests for employer support and received 22 back including ones from area hospitals, the MV Economic Development Council, MV Planning Commission, UMASS Lowell and the Southern NH WIB. He spoke about the Lowell WIB who he said was justifiably upset because he'd tried to recruit a hospital in their area whose president is their WIB chair.

Fred asked if the eligibility requirements have more latitude than WIA requirements and Rafael said that both unemployed and underemployed individuals are eligible to participate in the H1B program.

VI. Youth Council Update

Deborah said we received 800 youth summer job youth program applications from Lawrence, Haverhill, and Methuen. Six hundred were complete and entered in the lottery with 120 names pulled. Youth have completed workshops on work readiness training, health and safety information and career information.

We have more than enough businesses who have stepped forward and there will be an Employer Breakfast on June 17th at the Career Center. Deborah invited committee members to attend. Deborah said that youth will work up to 25 hours per week for six weeks and earn \$8.00 per hour. She said that the Youth Department staff did an excellent job.

Deborah also said that YouthWorks would be getting an additional \$150,000 to serve 78 more youth from Lawrence. We can't get them ready until the funding is announced.

Deborah said that the 2012 budget includes \$1.2m for connecting activities. She also spoke about the new eligibility barriers where 100% must be poor but only 15% need an additional barrier. Ralph said that he would like to track the participant demographics this year to see if they are different from in the past. Deborah said that CommCorp also asked us to track the demographics.

Deborah continued stating that we are working on the Annual Plan and there are some issues with performance outcomes as we move toward common measures. The increase in literacy and numeracy is something that must be tracked. Chili said that now that we are moving away from the 10 WIA regulations and going to common measures this is an issue across the state. We must use common measures beginning July 1st. It is difficult to post test after programs end but we are getting better at doing that.

One performance criteria is the diploma or GED receipt rate. When youth get jobs they often don't finish getting their GED. Some have completed 4 out of 5 tests and just

don't finish. We are now looking at 9 youth in a cohort that goes back to 2010. We are trying to get their GED completion information to the state. Chili did say a lot has to do with in-school programs. He said that people who receive skills training without getting a GED don't go anywhere. A diploma or GED is necessary for long-term employment.

Deborah said that the Race to the Top, which several schools in our region are participating in, must include college and career readiness in the curriculum. We are working with the schools.

Ralph wondered if we were part of the solution or part of the problem. We've provided GED training to out of school youth for many years and perhaps that encourages youth to drop-out of school. He said that maybe we should revisit the population and the mix of kids targeted and not exclude in-school youth.

He said that the immigrant experience has been distorted for Hispanics because over the last couple of generations there have been so many options discouraging timely educational effort. Benefits were denied to poor people who work hard and given to those who don't.

Deborah said that many youth come with such low educational levels that they need beginner or pre-GED level training. The whole emphasis is on middle skills and we need to get into the schools and see where we can help. She spoke about formulating a multi-generational community that understands college readiness. She mentioned that Secretary Solis recently sent a communiqué about helping people to attain middle skills and become part of the middle class.

Peter Matthews said that he understands simultaneously working with job skills training and the pursuit of a GED. He asked whether, at a certain point, are we aren't putting the cart before the horse when we have folks that are two thirds towards their GED and don't complete the last third. We must make sure they finish.

Chili said that we could do remediation first and then move to skills training. Youth have expressed that they want a GED but don't want a school setting. He also said that you need a minimum of a GED to get into companies. We have seen a lot more high school graduates this year and they are still at 6th or 7th grade aptitude levels.

Rafael said that we are not an education program but a job training program. Peter asked if Lynn had the same demographics as Lawrence and Chili said New Bedford is more like Lawrence. Rosemary suggested doing a pilot with a small cohort of students more GED ready reading at 8th grade level to see if there are better outcomes.

Chili did say that our employment wage gains and retention are the highest in the state. Juan suggested charging a fee to make clients responsible. Chili said that we can't do that as we are federally funded. Fred suggested a dialogue with employers to see if they would be willing to offer an incentive since education seems the problem and not work readiness.

Chili said that there is GED software available on the Career Center computers for clients and an education counselor from September through May who can bypass the GED waiting list.

Rosemary said that the board can set policy and could consider floating a pilot. A community spirited employer may be interested in offering an incentive but what else do we need to do to get better. Chili said that the biggest area is the ITA and not group programs. With ITAs there is no negotiated educational attainment whereas group programs required educational attainment and a number of GEDs. He said that in group programs people work to meet both employment and educational goals but that in the ITA system there is no way to measure educational attainment.

Peter Matthews said that rather than incent with cash he would rather spend time explaining what the minimum requirements are for different jobs within the company.

Rafael said that 95% of Lawrence students are on subsidized meals. There must be a sufficient number of poor students to fill programs who are already reading at an 8th grade level. He said that there are about 170 youth at Lawrence High School taking advanced placement courses.

Peter suggested targeting those dropouts who are closest to completing their degree. It was noted that a large number of 9th graders don't go on to 10th grade and are not counted as dropouts until they attain age 16. Chili said that Connecting Activities staff work to get drop out information from the school system but it cannot release the drop out list. Instead school administrators say that they could send a letter to kids who are dropping out to inform them of Career Center services. Deborah said that we have a great relationship with Lawrence High School and they want their students to succeed.

Fred referenced the Boston PIC who has two staff who go out and find dropouts and work with them in their own environment. Deborah said that UTech in Lowell finds and serves kids. Rafael said that students drop out for many reasons and that he feels that we are not in a position to persuade anyone to use our programs. With money being short we need to help people who can help themselves. Peter Matthews suggested that the high school add the sentence to the letter on Career Center services saying to the student that they are a good candidate to attain their GED.

Ralph said that people think that the dollars spent in Lawrence have gone to waste but over the last ten years there have been many improvements such as regaining high school accreditation. He said that there is an upward trend in Lawrence and that we should continue to help the many poor kids who are willing to make an effort. We should avoid business as usual and help poor people who just need a chance to gain additional skills and go to work.

VII. Other Business

Rafael said that we are in receipt of correspondence from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, Department of Criminal Justice Information Services. It states that we can no longer do CORI checks on youth participants in our summer youth employment program. These checks must be done by the vendor or employer who employs them. Chili said that he tried to explain that we do CORIs to help match kids to appropriate jobs but the effort was to no avail.

VII Adjourn

Having no further business Fred Carberry made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by Rosemary Chandler. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

Recorder