****

**METRO NORTH REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD**

**QUARTERLY REB MEETING NOTES**

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

Present: Dick Dalton, Debbie Jacobsen, Susan Jepson, Karen Sampson Johnson, Danny LeBlanc, Mina Reddy, Paul Richard, Cheryl Scott, Sandra Smith, Steve Sullivan, Mark Tardiff, Tricia Tyler, Sue Walsh

Absent: Charlene Bauer, Reed Brockman, James Donovan, Joanna Dowling, John Drinkwater, Yvette Drinkwater, Madeline Hoffman, Robert Jones, John Kendzior, Rose Lydon, Kambiz Maali, Lisa Amaya Price, Larisa Schelkin, Sandra Smith, Valerie Sutton, Mary Tighe, Kerry Wollner

REB Staff: Linda Bass, Robin Dion, Peter Farkas, Jonathan Hasak, Michael Hatfield, Meelynn Wong, Kimberly Napier

Guests: Dan Theobald, Vecna; Dick Dalton, Massachusetts Office of Business Development; Susan Mintz, Cambridge Office of Workforce Development; Ron Marlow, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development; Michael Merullo, Ideal Staffing Group and the Cambridge Office of Workforce Development; Linda Rohrer, Career Source; and Chris Brennan, The Career Place

**Introduction of New Member and Guests: Paul Richard**

Paul welcomed new member Dick Dalton from the Massachusetts Office of Business Development. Dick has been president of several hospitality/restaurant businesses, and returned from retirement to join Jay Ash’s team. In his new role working with new and existing businesses, Dick is serving 10 of our 20 communities.

Paul also welcomed guests Dan Theobald, Vecna; Susan Mintz, Cambridge Office of Workforce Development; and Michael Merullo, Ideal Staffing Group and the Cambridge Office of Workforce Development.

**Review of September 2015 Meeting Notes: Paul Richard**

Paul requested a motion to approve the notes of the September 2015 REB meeting. The motion was moved and seconded, and the notes of the September 2015 REB meeting were approved as presented.

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |

**Committee Reports**

Adult Basic Education Transitions to College and Careers: Mina Reddy

Topics of discussion in meetings this past quarter included: Career Ready 101; transportation costs as a barrier for adults; and aligning curricula with community colleges. The committee is also working on developing a database for employers to connect job seekers with current employment opportunities.

Joint Committee: Susan Jepson/Sue Walsh

Susan mentioned that the committee as whole continues to be proud of both career centers with regard to meeting and exceeding their goals. In addition, both career centers are working to transition from WIA to WIOA; support from REB associate directors has been very helpful.

Youth Council: Jonathan Hasak

The Youth Council is piloting OYAP in two high Metro North high schools (Chelsea and Revere), and is also focusing on strengthening its membership through adding private employers.

**Update on REB Activities: Linda Bass**

The Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) was recently awarded a $220,000 grant from by EOEHD grant. These funds will need to be spent between December 1 and June 30. Metro North REB is the lead for this grant, which will focus on outreach to underrepresented populations with the goal of connecting with various programs including ABE and out-of-school youth programs to encourage individuals to explore/enter training, and/or to connect them with employers in the industry with current job openings.

**FY 2017-2020 Strategic Planning Task Force: Linda Bass**

The task force met twice this past quarter, and generated some good ideas. One discussion centered on prioritizing industries. It was decided that the current industries – life sciences, advanced manufacturing, IT, healthcare, and STEM occupations – will remain high priority, but we have also added a services cluster – which will include jobs that may be more accessible for individuals with barriers to employment (retail, construction, property management, etc.). Other discussion topics included shifting funds due to the WIOA transition, and how to optimize efficacy around the current OJT model. In an upcoming meeting in December, the task force will focus on career center service design – and then in March, there will be a presentation to the board that will summarize the task force’s recommendations for board approval.

**Presentation on What the Workforce Development System Can Learn From Staffing Agencies: Mike Merullo**

Paul Richard introduced Mike Merullo, who has been working in the employment and staffing industry since 1992, in both the for-profit private and non-profit public sectors.  He has 20 years of experience managing a mid-sized temp agency and has also owned his own small staffing agency, Ideal Staffing Group, since 2011. Ideal Staffing Group specializes in the placement of administrative and accounting/finance candidates into both temporary and temp to perm positions. Since 2008, he has also managed the Cambridge Works program at the Cambridge Office of Workforce Development.

Summary of the Cambridge Works Program by Mike Merullo:

The Cambridge Works Program, which operates out of the Office of Workforce Development in Cambridge, hires Cambridge residents between the ages of 18-35, and places them into paid internships, at Cambridge work sites, for three months, where they also receive professional development and mentoring services. For private sector businesses, oftentimes the internships become full-time jobs. Participants are required to attend classes and work in order to continue for the duration of the program. Money is set aside for wages for participants; the significant staffing costs speak to the intensity of this program. Recruitment efforts are handled within the Cambridge Office of Workforce Development – as well as through referrals.

**Q & A/Discussion**

**Question**: The REB is considering new services for the career centers so they act more like an employment agency, driven by a business need. One of the challenges is – how can we work with a large volume of customers and yet make meaningful referrals to businesses with job openings?

**MM**: Funding of wages is a barrier – the employers want to go to a temp agency because they only want to hire for three months to avoid having to deal with layoffs, employment, taxes, etc. The Cambridge program is very expensive, as the city pays for wages. Career centers can partner with agencies that have long-standing relationships with employers who offer good, long-term positions. The agency would get the referral from Metro North career centers – and then the agency then bills the client. This is probably the best way to get career center clients into trainings or internships though training and preparing the client to enter these positions.

**Member comment**: The career centers have been working with staffing agencies for almost 20 years. It might hurt our partnerships with them if we duplicate their services.

**Member comment**: Let’s focus on what can we learn from staffing agencies – not necessarily work directly with the temp agencies. For example – when we write grants, and require an internship – is there a way that we can work with a temp agency to provide work experience via an internship? Do temp agencies have any advice on how the career centers can work with a higher volume of customers? It can be a challenge to work more like an employment agency with 20k+ customers each year. Also, the world is changing; there’s going to be many more short-term contract, project-based positions coming available. This is evidenced in part by the popularity of websites that advertise for one-time tasks and projects (eg., Task Rabbit, Mechanical Turk).

**MM:** Perhaps the larger agencies see more short-term positions; the smaller ones do not. Also, there used to be a much greater reliance on the expertise of staffing agencies – where there agency would do most, if not all, of the screening. Today companies want to do comprehensive screenings themselves, including a phone and in-person interviews.

**Member comment:** There are between 60-70 temp agencies in the Metro North region. Many have one to multiple specialty areas.

**Member comment:** Perhaps a future board meeting can focus on some of the challenges of a specific population. This is a different discussion than what employers might need that might be filled through temp agencies.

**Member comment:** The Cambridge Works program is very focused on meeting employers’ needs. The assessment piece is so key – we can’t understand the skills of our customers to the extent that temp agencies can – but it seems to be what is required. We have that relationship with the client – so that when we make the referral – we have done that background – but this is difficult to replicate with the career centers.

**Member comment:** We don’t have time to do much one-on-one screening, so it is generally done within the context of specific programs.

**Member comment:** There is so much work that needs to be done with career center customers – not only the career centers understanding what they bring to the table, but also preparing them to effectively present that they can bring.

**Member comment:** Screening against job qualifications is critical, but time-consuming for the career centers to do with the volume. Job matching software would be very beneficial in this regard.

**Presentation on The State’s Workforce Development Priorities and Perspective on Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Ron Marlow**

Paul Richard introduced Ronald Marlow, who serves as Undersecretary of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. In his prior position, Undersecretary Marlow was the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Mass Housing, and prior to that he was Assistant Secretary for the Executive Office of Administration and Finance.

Summary of Undersecretary Marlow’s presentation:

There is a need for a broader conversation that looks at the government’s expectations of WIOA, and calibrating those expectations to the reality with regard to the career center clientele. For many, the career centers remain an enigma in terms of understanding who comprises the client population. Some believe that the clientele consists of individuals with the least amount of skills and job preparedness. Yet others believe that many of the centers serve higher educated, higher-skilled individuals, and that as a whole, the centers reflect the Commonwealth fairly accurately, with regard to various demographics, educational attainment, or skillsets.

Under the Federal Government’s expectations of the labor exchange system, there is a notion that the type of assessment that would need to take place to better meet the needs of employers is taking place already in the context of WIOA. Even this notion of collapsing the three tiers into a single tier becomes the federal government’s way of reinforcing their own expectations that that assessment is taking place. When the economy is good, and the client population declines – that may become more of a reality. So – how do we, in a competitive environment in which even employers who greatly rely on the career centers (such as Amazon – which the career centers played a major part in helping them meet their employment needs). Amazon did not realize the role of the career centers in part because of the branding – each center has a different name, and function in different ways.

Our focus is on how to arm the career centers with the tools – not to compete – but to complement and supplement staffing agencies. The staffing agencies can’t be the only resource, nor should they be – and many of the career center clients will not find their way to a staffing agency.

WIOA has become all-consuming as we get closer to implementation (expected July 1, 2016). The draft plan has been submitted to the Governor. We will move to a public comment period in January 2016. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is also involved in the process. They are thinking through the question of how do we have the kind of coordination/collaborations at the state agency level that will better serve the clients (either through the career centers, Mass Rehab, Mass Commission for the Blind, etc.). We have great leadership, and are well ahead of other states in this effort. We are moving aggressively.

WIOA is not a sea-change. Rather, it’s an opportunity to improve on things we’ve done in the past, and to establish new collaborations. Our key agenda items include:

1. Create an environment where feedback becomes paramount – to ensure that one is always moving in the right direction.
2. Make labor market data more useful to WDBs and other agencies through making it more presentable on the website, and also by providing tools to leverage and manipulate this information. We are also focusing on creating a sense of commonality of expectations and service delivery across the system, so that when an employer engages – s/he will not only get service – but will also get service they did not anticipate, in that we can help find candidates with transferable skills. The ways in which the public career center system can be responsive to employers are expanding. David Muldrew will be working with the BSRs, career center directors, the BizWorks team and others to determine what does our employment engagement model look like, and how can it be tweaked by region, so that regions can be on the margins, following the model but customizing it to their particular circumstances.
3. How do we better serve those who are disadvantaged? How do we have a MA system that complements/supplements those on the federal level that gets to those who have the greatest need, and, how do we create linkages – not only to our career centers, but to a wide range of our CBO’s. We have yet to see the Governor’s budget but we hope that it will speak to these needs.

We want to be your partner and your tool as to how to get the Executive Office to understand your needs, and determine how to better serve the Commonwealth’s residents.

**Q & A/Discussion**

**Member question**: The Governor has highlighted the new flexibility offered under the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). What are the new kinds of flexibility you (or the Governor) believe we have?

**RM**: The flexibility is in focusing on the “spirit” of the rule – not the letter of the rule. For example, in the procurement process – there will be an opportunity for all WDBs to have a voice in what should constitute the rules, so that we can be most responsive. Another example is in the context of the certification of the workforce boards. How can we be more responsive in that process – what are some of the key issues that the EOLWD should be thinking about and address? And where do we push envelope on your behalf vis-a-vis the feds? Another area is in discussion about how to money to the field, through the formula. We look at the metrics that drive the formula making. There are a lot of debates as to whether those formulae reflect those who do great work – or do they reflect those who are seeing a lot of customers.

You are always free to communicate your needs to me – and I can try to help you best I can. This point is time is also a good opportunity to catalog what you think could be improved in WIA – so that we can do better in the implementation of WIOA.

**Member question**: Where is the connect between what the state is recommending we do – and what DOL is requiring?

**RM:** You’ll see that in our combined plan. We think that at least at the regional level, the DOL is looking at the direction we’re moving in to help inform their final rulemaking. Many of the federal agencies have not finalized their regulations around WIOA – and we believe they are looking to see how the states can inform their decision-making. We think this is how we have influence – as well as through holding a public comment period. We will use this period as a way to help us understand if we are giving you the tools you need to get the job done.

**Next Steps: Paul Richard**

Today’s discussion will help inform the next Strategic Planning Task Force meeting, scheduled for Monday, December 21, 9:30-11:30, at the REB.

**Adjourn**

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

**The next REB meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 30, 8:00-9:30 AM at the Metro North REB, 186 Alewife Brook Parkway, Suite 216, Fresh Pond Mall, Cambridge.**