

Summary Notes
2002 Regional Forum on WIA Reauthorization
Concord, NH

April 23, 2002

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration scheduled a series of public forums in March - May 2002 to hear comments on issues related to the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The second of two Region I, Boston area, forums was held on April 23, 2002 at the Courtyard Marriott Hotel in Concord, New Hampshire. A total of 38 participants attended and 12 participants made comments. Also in attendance were representatives from ETA's Regional and National Office and staff from Technical Assistance and Training Corporation.

The session was introduced as follows:

- **Welcome and Introductions**
Mike Powers, President
Workforce Opportunity Council

- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**
Robert Semler, Regional Administrator
Employment and Training Administration

- **Explanation of Public Comment Process**
Carole McCarthy, TATC Facilitator

Carole McCarthy moderated the public comment session that followed. Pre-registered speakers were invited to present their comments first.

12 speakers presented oral comments, some of whom submitted written comments to supplement their presentations. The summary below considers only the oral comments recorded during the forum. Written comments submitted by presenters will be summarized in the final report to be submitted at a later date.

The comments are categorized according to the topics in the *Discussion Guide: WIA Reauthorization Issues*, followed by additional topics addressed, as follows:

- I. Business Engagement
- II. Governance/State Flexibility
- III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs
- IV. One-Stop Career Centers
- V. Unemployment Insurance/Employment Service Reform and the One-Stop System
- VI. Improved Opportunities for Training
- VII. Other Comments

I. Business Engagement

- If we truly want business leaders to stay engaged in our work, we must work towards simplifying the process of utilizing WIA funds. The focus of Board meetings continues to be operational. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- We need to clearly understand the challenges associated with recruiting and sustaining participation of business on WIBs and committees. We need to clearly understand that time is money. We have learned from experiences in Vermont that in order to get information from the businesses, we need to go to them directly. Then, once we obtain the necessary information from the businesses, we need to do something with it to impact them in a positive way. Credibility is everything, and businesses hope for fairly immediate results, as seen in the presentation of profit/loss statements and balance sheets. *Business Liaison*

II. Governance/State Flexibility

Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- Flexibility should not only be preserved between programs, but also strengthened in the reauthorization of both TANF and WIA. This would help enable them to meet the demands of the customers. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Promote the workforce development system's relevance by providing adequate funding. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- WIA appropriations should cover the costs of partner contributions to providing their core services within the One-Stop Centers. It is unrealistic to think they can contribute to those costs on their own. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- It is unrealistic to think that the WIA system can police the Pell grants by asking for performance measurements unrelated to WIA. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Promote workforce development system relevance through adequate funding. As DOL is conducting a review of the Dislocated Worker Formula, include a provision for small state minimums to prevent significant annual fluctuations. Increase appropriations within adult funding streams so states can allocate significant amounts to incumbent worker training. Employer-based training is critical to developing skilled workers and expanding capacity. Promote collaboration to eliminate duplication by providing funding to link systems. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- One-Stop funding should be expanded to include operational and system development costs, and enable the Centers to be less vulnerable to the knee-jerk reactions of the economy. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- TANF funding should be increased across the board. The program should also support two-parent families. Eligibility requirements should be increased so more people are eligible. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- It does not seem appropriate to discuss performance until programs are adequately funded. The employment service system has been level-funded for the last 10 years, yet salaries and costs have increased. Additionally, the system is now supporting expensive Information Technology. It becomes a choice between supporting technology in the One-Stop and laying people off and/or leaving positions open when individual leave. Customer surveys show that what is important is helping people get a job. There needs to be an adequate number of well-trained staff. A funding grant is used to build and maintain the One-Stop system. It is important not to lose the ground they have gained. The emphasis should be on staff-assisted services. Staff should be knowledgeable in all programs. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Regarding WIA Reauthorization, there should be more accountability associated with funds. The system is not training young people in areas where there is a need and where training is relevant. *Business Liaison*
- Congress needs to appropriate more money and increase the small-state minimum. New Hampshire is currently at a level that uses basic fixed costs necessary to operate any program. The money received is inadequate to run the system. Provide greater flexibility between categories of funding is needed. It is difficult at the moment to make transitions. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Guarantee funding for small states. *Representative of State Government Agency*

Comments Regarding Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership

- Eliminate barriers to employer and citizen participation by making Local Board membership selection a flexible and locally-driven process, and by combining Local WIBs and organizations at the discretion of local officials. WIBs are too large, membership is overly restrictive in the Act, and States and Local Boards should have the flexibility to define their local membership. Simplify membership requirements by modifying the statute and provide for combined adult and youth Boards at the discretion of local officials. Promote Local Boards as the collaborators and translators between what is going on in the local economy and the local workforce providers. Though there is nothing actually preventing them from doing this, the statute leans a bit too heavily on the micro program management side for them to do so. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Give states the authority to eliminate duplicative functions between State and Local WIBs. 23 of 25 functions are done by both the State and Local WIBs. He recommends eliminating youth procurement in WIA. He also recommends retaining the disabled

veterans outreach program and the local veterans employment representative program within the One-Stop system. States should be authorized to organize veterans consistent with state and local needs. *Representative of State Government Agency*

General Comments Regarding Flexibility and Governance

- Invest adequate authority to promote state flexibility to shape programs to respond to customer needs. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- More flexibility is needed at the state and local level to determine the role of the Board. In small states, business leaders in every region of the state do not always participate enough to be effective. They often become discouraged by limited and unstable funding, and this hinders real systems change needed to better meet the needs of customers. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

- Encourage maximum flexibility in the design of service delivery. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

Partnership

- Programs should work together to increase cost effectiveness and program effectiveness. Vermont is the first state to approve a Unified State Plan. As a result of this program, they have witnessed higher earnings in the state and a great number of families getting off welfare. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- TANF should be required to register with One-Stops as a condition of TANF. However, three issues must first be addressed:
 1. Performance measures and outcomes for TANF, WIA, and Employment Service must be structured so that ES and WIA programs are not punished for servicing TANF customers.
 2. WIA and Employment Service funding must be increased to underwrite the increased service demand on these systems from the influx of TANF recipients. This is necessary to amount to something more than processing registrations.
 3. Investments must be made in Information Technology so the programs can communicate with each other. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Promote increased customer participation by not requiring lengthy registration requirements. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Although New Hampshire's Workforce Investment System is recognized for its high level of involvement with TANF, it still faces challenges and barriers to achieving a non-duplicative system that fully recognizes the unique role each partner was established to

provide. Some of these challenges are confidentiality, accessibility, and different program definitions. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- Active partners are often hampered by barriers that exist at the federal and department level. Incentives are needed on a federal level for partners who are in the system to allow for waivers for those things currently prohibited. To truly encourage this, federal departments need to get together. We need the freedom to do what we need to do on a state and local level. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

Job Retention and Advancement

- WIA needs to support a greater commitment to follow-up services with all WIA customers in order to improve retention services. This is an area where adult programming should be consistent with youth programming. In addition, adequate funding is needed to follow up with youth services and incumbent workers. TANF and WIA must be structured to compliment each other in this area. *Representative of One-State Government Agency*
- Reauthorization must keep work requirements at 30 hours a week and count education as work as long as progress is being made. People will be better and prepared sooner. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Employment is only possible once barriers are resolved, including those dealing with support services. Wages and work are not the only factors that contribute to economic self-sufficiency. Childcare, transportation, housing allowances, among others, all play a part in an individual's ability to work. Additionally, public transportation in New Hampshire is inadequate and there is a limited amount of low-income housing. Grants are needed to address these factors. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Simplify eligibility requirements. Present requirements are too complex to all who use them. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

IV. One-Stop Career Centers

No comments were made specifically on this topic.

V. Unemployment Insurance/Employment Service Reform and the One-Stop System

No comments were made specifically on this topic.

VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

- Increase resources to increase incumbent-worker training. There is a strong need to provide direct support to enhance the registered-apprenticeship program and provide innovative, focused training. This qualifier and the restriction to the so-called 15% funds need to be significantly broadened, including increased funding so that critical services to the disadvantaged will not be reduced. The benefits to this incumbent worker-training program would include:
 1. The widespread concern about states attracting employers will be actively and positively affected by WIA's support for incumbent worker training.
 2. The linkage between TANF and WIA will be strengthened so that former TANF recipients who have become employed can have access to skills training so they can continue to move up the career ladder.
 3. An improved economy that benefits from a public/private partnership that broadly recognizes skill strengthening within the incumbent workforce.
 4. Public recognition of ETA's new emphasis of apprenticeship. This program guarantees good wages from day one, increases skills and the provision of high skilled workers. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- There are too many rules for certifying training providers. Furthermore, the current requirement that training providers report on all program participants regardless of funding sources is having a negative impact on the number of providers willing to participate. This in turn makes it hard to meet customer needs. Customers should have access to good information and be provided with a range of choices. In addition, training providers should only report on participants funded under WIA. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- Many dislocated workers and other adults are interested in entrepreneur training. Vermont, with its small business development center, has good programs in the area. Although WIA funds are used for this purpose, they cannot count outcomes in performance target, thereby providing a disincentive to providing the service to our customers. This is counterproductive, especially in rural areas where self-employment is high. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- Provide for the expansion of vocational education and training timeframes in TANF, rather than the proposed restriction in the administration's proposal. Expansion leads to an increased ability to coordinate and utilize resources to increase the number of higher-skilled TANF job seekers. This would better ensure self-sufficiency and provide more opportunity to move up a career ladder. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- Economic self-sufficiency is the goal. Successful TANF supports full integration of families into economy. Most successful programs provide a mix of work and education along with complementary support services. Post-secondary education is a necessary component for families to achieve self-sufficiency. Without post-secondary education or GED certification, an individual is only capable of obtaining minimum wage jobs. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- In Maine, individuals can earn college credit while still earning money. Graduates of one program earn an average of \$11.71, as compared to the national average of former welfare recipients who earn \$7.15. Regarding Livable Wage Standards, a person who can earn wages and contribute tax dollars does so instead of drawing on government programs. Current laws in New Hampshire show that an adult with one child must earn \$15.75 per hour in order to get out of poverty. Education and training is necessary. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- With regards to education and job training, the 30% cap should be lifted or increased. States should be given the flexibility to determine which activities qualify as work. Additional pilot programs should be developed in New Hampshire. A mixed strategy for job training is effective. Education should be work-focused and training should be coordinated. The training limit should be lifted. Finally, DHHS and WIA workers should be trained jointly. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- It is difficult for many individuals to work for 30 hours a week. The proposed 40 hours per week would be even harder to meet. Measures should measure outcome rather than participation rate. Additionally, other activities should count as participation, particularly education. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Increase TANF and WIA integration. There should be an increased emphasis on allowing for longer-term post-secondary education. It goes against reason to get people trained for dead-end jobs. Yet this happens because it can happen quickly. However, enabling them to continue in education longer would secure them for better jobs. The work-first philosophy has merits, but should recognize the merits of better education. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Make amendments that allow job training and clarify eligibility requirements. The amount of documentation needed for eligibility should also be cut back. For instance, birth certificates should not be required. Furthermore, front-line staff are currently facing the challenge of helping eligible students access the programs. *Representative of State Government Agency*

Youth Programs

- Youth programs should be administered consistently with adult programs in terms of service provider identification and selection. The core principle of collaboration and inclusion is confounded in the requirement that youth programs must be competitively bid, thus pitting providers against each other rather than bringing them together to enhance services. Instead of requiring that all programs be competitively bid, other options such as sole source and consortium awards should be available. Providing the use of RFPs as an option would enhance flexibility and allow States and Local WIBs to use more of the limited youth funding directly for youth. This is particularly significant

for rural areas, where few if any youth service providers exist. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- Documentation needs to be simplified. It is time consuming to access documentation in order to work with youth. This issue is huge and discouraging. The school lunch criteria should be considered. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

VII. Other Comments

Performance Measures

- Eliminate complexity of WIA to administrators, legislators and the general public by simplifying performance standards. They are expensive and complicated, and not all that relevant. They require the implementation of intensive work processes and are expensive to capture. They only relate to Title I providers and do not promote systems or integration. Retain the following measures for Title I programs: entered employment rate applied to older youth and adults only, and the employment retention rate earnings. Delete the rest except for those dealing with customer satisfaction. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- The incentive award system that is currently in place should be restructured by decoupling performance expectations between WIA, adult education, and Perkins. In theory it promotes system accountability. WIA is working with stakeholders that cannot or will not meet these benchmarks. It should replace the policy with tier funding that rewards systems performance without penalizing good WIA performance. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Standardized performance goals should reflect the work that truly supports a business-driven system. TANF employment and training services should be offered in the One-Stops. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- The current eligible training provider system is cumbersome, difficult to manage, and often a disincentive for training providers to service WIA customers. There are simply not enough WIA customers depositing ITA funds into the system to make it worthwhile for provider to track all participants. Many training providers view the tracking as an invasion of privacy and refuse to participate. Reporting requirements should be eliminated, but should determine ways to use existing data collection methods. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

Minimum Wage

- It would be great if the government would support the Universal Living Wage campaign. New Hampshire is the only state that has not raised the minimum wage, resulting in a huge availability of jobs. The campaign would make it necessary for people to receive

enough to pay for the increasing costs of living in the State. The obstacles people face include skyrocketing housing costs, a lack of housing, a lack of availability of drug and alcohol rehabilitation and dental care, and a lack of childcare. Obtaining access to support services when an individual moves from Welfare-to-Work is very difficult. Fortunately, the opportunity exists for people to go back to school to help them earn enough money to live in this state. *Social Worker*

Other Recommendations

- The national Departments of Labor and Human Services should jointly review the GAO findings regarding WIA and TANF coordination to find areas of common ground that can be communicated jointly to states. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- The distinction between staff assisted and non-assisted core services are unnecessary. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Legal Immigrants should be eligible for TANF and other benefits. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- The administration's definition and coverage of families must be defined more broadly. In other words, marriage should be supported for the people who choose it. However, marriage is not an option for everyone. Programs should provide income support and services, and two parent families should not be pursued at the expense of single parent families. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Greater flexibility should be given to grant extensions. The 60-month TANF cap should be increased, and the option to stop the clock should be granted in certain circumstances. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Recognize the importance of technology and integrate it. There should be a separate pot of money and increased technical assistance on the federal level to share data. The bottlenecks are generally in the areas of data collection and technology. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

General Comments

- Despite the success of TANF in 2002, there are still lots of problems. The quality of new jobs is not as good as it could be. Often, individuals are not receiving benefits. There is also a lack of access to education both on the primary and post-secondary level. Lack of housing and childcare continues to be an issue. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- One of the disconnects at the Job Corps level is the lack of vocational program prioritization in identifying business needs. *Business Liaison*

- The day-to-day work done by local individuals are outstanding. Everything about the process needs to be simplified. Funding needs to be increased. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*