

Summary Notes 2002 WIA Reauthorization Forums Washington, DC Public Forum

April 17, 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). A public forum was held on April 17, 2002 in the Department's Frances Perkins Building Auditorium. A total of 157 participants attended and 23 made comments. Also in attendance were representatives from the Division of One-Stop Operations and from Technical Assistance and Training Corporation (TATC).

The session was introduced as follows:

- **Welcome and Introductions**
Mason Bishop, Special Advisor to the Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration
- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**
Mason Bishop
- **Explanation of Public Comment Process**
Cheryl Martin, TATC Facilitator

Cheryl Martin moderated the public comment session that followed. Pre-registered speakers were invited to present their comments first. A total of 23 speakers presented oral comments, some of whom submitted written comments to supplement their presentations. The summary below considers only the comments recorded during the forum. Written comments will be summarized in the final report to be submitted at a later date.

Comments are categorized according to the topics in the *Discussion Guide on WIA Reauthorization Issues*:

- 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 Security Reform and the One-Stop System
- VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

In addition, participants were asked, "If you could change one thing about WIA, what would it be?"

I. Business Engagement

- In our survey of 32 sectoral training program leaders, 20 noted that the sectoral approach really helped them engage the business community. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- Don't lose linkage with economic development. Employers need to not just sit on the WIBs, but also need to use the system and come to the One-Stops for workers. *National Association*

II. Governance / State Flexibility

- Expand the WIBs' authority for system-wide coordination by putting it in Title V, not Title I. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

Employer Engagement in Workforce Investment System

- Regulations should reward systems that get funding from local businesses. *National Association*
- Business already has the dominant role in system governance. The system needs to involve businesses that take "high road" strategies in investing in their employees. *Union Representative*
- Local businesses have the best understanding of labor market needs and economic changes in the region. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- Excessive paperwork deters business engagement and also invades employees' privacy. *Local Government Agency*

Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- We think the public sector should have a central role. A public consortium model is preferable to a private competitive model. Folks in the field say the latter model turns into a race to the bottom and results in "creaming" that excludes harder-to-serve customers. *Union Representative*
- At the local level, WIA is under-funded. Cutting WIA funds would be ill-advised. Expanding industries (e.g., health care) will still have to look overseas for skilled workers. *National Advocacy Organization*
- We need funding levels that are sufficient to serve all workers. *Union Representative*
- The Administration and Congress must do more to protect and expand WIA funding in future years. WIA is under-funded and cannot adequately meet current needs, especially in these uncertain economic times. Our 2003 funding allocation was greatly reduced (down 26% in our local area). *Local WIB Member*

- All funding cuts should be restored. *National Advocacy Organization*
- The Administration's 2003 budget request zeroes out the National Farmworker Jobs Program (WIA Section 167). Congress has recognized for 35 years that this program needs to be national due to farmworker migration. Otherwise, who will be responsible for serving people who spend different months in different states? We urge full reauthorization and funding of WIA Section 167. *One-Stop Partner: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs*
- WIA & TANF training funds should not be reduced. *National Association*
- More money is needed to make reforms work. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Congress members who want to cut services should visit these One-Stops to see the needs and frustrations. Everyone needs to be held accountable. *One-Stop Partner: TANF*

Balancing State and Local Administration of the System

- Maintain local flexibility to establish programs and policies. *Local WIB Member*
- The Employment Service must be accountable to local boards. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Strong local authority and flexibility for mayors and their local WIBs must remain at the core of WIA to ensure that needs of local and regional employers are met. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership

- There needs to be more labor participation on WIBs. The current terminology implies that business understands local markets needs and labor unions don't. We strongly disagree—many apprenticeship programs are union-sponsored. Labor is an important mechanism in the local labor market. *Union Representative*
- We need to leverage funding and let workforce boards direct resources. *State Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*

General Comments Regarding Flexibility and Governance

- Build upon, not replace, established connections between employers and the workforce development system. WIA provisions such as board structure and Individual Training Accounts are useful, but requiring them to be universally adopted across very diverse labor markets contradicts WIA's stated goal of local flexibility. *National Advocacy Organization*
- WIA is still a system in transition and unproven in its ability to provide the training and support needed for workers to reach self-sufficiency. WIA services need to be fully available, publicly administered, and fully funded and to have strong labor union involvement. We don't want a revolving door of low-wage, low-skill jobs. *Union Representative*

III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

Partnership

- Collaboration is an effective means to allocate staff and resources. TANF should be strong, engaged partner in the workforce development system. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- Linkages to community-based organizations (CBOs) are needed to ensure access to the One-Stop system. Many community-based organizations (CBOs) have One-Stop contracts, but it is essential that there be explicit linkages. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Local relationship building and innovation have made a difference. WIA should address state and federal barriers to local innovation and cooperation. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Projects With Industry grants from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration use a business partnership model. This program has been cost-effective (\$1700 per placement), but the Administration wants to eliminate its funding. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- Need to have partnerships with health care industry, universities, research partnerships, and school districts (e.g., for teacher training where there are teacher shortages). *One-Stop Partner: TANF*
- Adult literacy and schools are important. *State Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- WIA forces collaboration down, but doesn't start at the top. Right now the tail is trying to wag the dog. Collaboration and resource sharing need to start at the federal level. *State Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- We need resource sharing to be broader to make a difference. *State WIB Member*
- Local WIBs and contractors should have parity with Vocational Rehabilitation. *National Advocacy Organization*

Developing "Commonalities"

- Use this reauthorization to direct the Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services to implement common workforce measures within a year. This would help integrate services. *Local WIB Member*

WIA-TANF Linkages

- When serving TANF recipients in One-Stops, emphasis should be on training for living-wage jobs with career ladders to self-sufficiency. Current sequence from core services hasn't worked to get people trained. *Union Representative*
- WIA & TANF are distinct systems. Neither should subsume the other. *Union Representative*

- We strongly support TANF being a mandatory WIA partner, but its funding must not be reduced. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Having WIA be the presumptive provider of TANF services would be a big mistake in certain locales. In our local area, One-Stops have not proven their ability to serve people with multiple barriers to employment, while many TANF providers have been much more successful. Requiring all TANF recipients to go to One-Stops would overwhelm the system and lower the quality of services. *Local Advocacy Organization*
- TANF should be a full partner in WIA. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Most welfare agencies don't know how to screen for disabilities. WIA should help with professional disability assessments. *National Advocacy Organization*
- The clock is ticking on many thousands of TANF recipients with disabilities. According to GAO, 44% of all remaining TANF recipients have disability in their family. They are unlikely to be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) because their disabilities are not severe enough, so their only hopes are TANF and WIA. Both laws must coordinate with VR and be amended to create a seamless system of training and support. *National Advocacy Organization*

Job Retention and Advancement

- Sectoral training programs benefit low-income workers, including welfare recipients. Median earnings rose from \$4,000 before training to \$13,000 one year after training and \$17,000 two years after training. Participants gained greater access to fringe benefits: 78% had health insurance, 77% had paid vacation, and 64% had paid sick leave. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- In integrating with TANF, put less emphasis on Work First and more on making sure people get training and can move to good jobs. *Union Representative*
- We need to help low-income workers access training that helps them advance in labor market. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Access to training and education and to high-paying jobs is essential to working families. Retaining and creating good jobs should be the system's primary priority. Workers' skill and career development needs must be at the forefront. *Union Representative*
- TANF recipients' options should not be limited; they should fully participate in WIA. *Local WIB Member*
- Encourage local flexibility to allow TANF or WIA to pay for career advancement and support services. *National Association*
- We need a system that is not just a "second chance," but is demand-driven. Where are the jobs, skills, and careers that will get people out of poverty? *State WIB Member*
- A successful program operating in two urban counties in my state focuses on high-demand fields. It gives additional training and support services to get low-

wage working parents into these high-demand jobs. There is a wealth of talent that is eager to move up and can do so if programs are well-designed. *State WIB Member*

Access to Other Supports

- Support services help employers as well as workers. *One-Stop Partner: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs*
- It is hard to access support services for TANF clients. *National Association*
- Provide guidance to make sure that populations with multiple barriers to employment are served, and keep serving them until self-sufficiency is attained. *One-Stop Partner: Adult Education*

IV. One-Stop Career Centers

- We need more acknowledgment of the need for skilled workforce development professionals, e.g., through a certification system. Workforce development professionals are the people who actually implement programs. They need to be trained on a wide range of issues, including ethics and serving customers with disabilities. *National Association*
- Our evaluation of One-Stops in our local area documented a number of problems with core and intensive services, including broken appointments, long waits, and lack of access for Latinos. *Local Advocacy Organization*
- Community colleges are mandatory WIA partners via Perkins Act or Adult Education. They need alternative funding approaches to alleviate problems and increase participation. *National Association*

Access for Persons with Disabilities

- Persons with disabilities are a hard-to-serve population. There is little evidence that One-Stops are serving them. Some co-location and referrals occur, but there is no data collection on this. Anecdotally, persons with disabilities are generally not served. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- Many persons with disabilities need specialty service providers who are not included in One-Stops. Some of our members have to pay a lot just to be in a One-Stop, such as \$60,000 just to get referrals. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- Disability organizations are not getting national DOL grants unless the local WIB wants to include them, but many are reluctant to include specialty providers. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- We need data collection on and incentives for One-Stops to serve persons with disabilities. *Non-Profit Service Provider*

- The disability community has felt a historical disappointment in its lack of access to mainstream job training programs, dating back to CETA and JTPA. 70% of adults with disabilities are unemployed because programs don't work for them. Serious work between the disability community and DOL is needed. *National Advocacy Organization*
- WIA disability provisions are not strong enough. Where is the data and when will we know how persons with disabilities get served? Where are the needed monitoring, enforcement, and technical assistance? We cannot have One-Stops be a dead end. Make disability a priority in next WIA reauthorization and develop incentives to serve persons with disabilities. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Clarify that persons with disabilities can be served by both Vocational Rehabilitation and One-Stops. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Performance measures should reduce disincentives to serve persons with disabilities. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Provide on-site support at One-Stops for persons with disabilities. *National Advocacy Organization*

Workforce Development System as the “Single Access Point”

- Publicly funded workforce system will become single access point by showing excellent value and enhanced customer service and greater access via service hours, technology. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- Many Latinos don't access One-Stop services because of their short-term need for jobs. *National Advocacy Organization*
- WIA did not help me when I was unemployed for most of 2001. One-Stops in my local area were frustrating and not helpful. No one who worked there knew anything. One case manager spent an hour on a personal phone call while a customer was waiting. There were long waits for assessment tests and case manager appointments. The training vendor lists were outdated and training providers are putting clients in dead-end jobs. The average customer cannot jump through all the hoops that are required to get served. *One-Stop Partner: TANF*

V. UI / ES Reform and the One-Stop System

- We are extremely skeptical of the Administration's proposal. Its withdrawal of federal commitment would destabilize system, causing states to race to the bottom. *Union Representative*
- We will oppose any efforts to privatize the service delivery system. We want a central role for State Employment Service and federally funded Unemployment Insurance. *Union Representative*

Employer Services

- The Employment Service advertising positions they can't fill. This is an unwise use of tax dollars—employers should pay for that. *Business*
- Some services (e.g., outplacement assistance for downsizing companies or customized training) should be done by outside vendors, not public One-Stops. *Business*

VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

Training Funds

- A smaller percentage of funds has gone to occupational skills training because funds were diverted for One-Stop start-up. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- We need resources not only for One-Stop infrastructure, but also more resources for training. *Union Representative*
- Fewer people get occupational training now, due to the drain on funds for setting up One-Stop infrastructure. WIA should make it easier to reserve funds for skills training and to make all partners contribute funding to common infrastructure. *National Advocacy Organization*
- There must be major investment in basic and occupational skills. Reauthorization should include adequate resources for training to meet employers' needs, and thus to attain and sustain economic recovery. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Funds for training have been diverted for One-Stop start-up. *One-Stop Partner: Adult Education*
- Not enough funds go to actual training. *Non-Profit Service Provider*

Adult Programs

- The National Farmworker Jobs Program (WIA Section 167) enhances the vision of One-Stops. WIA 167 grantees offer culturally and appropriate services and outreach, bilingual staff, and non-traditional hours. These services are generally not available in One-Stops without WIA 167 programs. *One-Stop Partner: Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Programs*

Sequence of Services and "Work-First" Policies

- Tiered services are interpreted in ways that discourage low-income persons from getting training; "Work-First" policies pressure customers to take the first job available. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- Mixed messages about "Work-First" have prevented workers from getting training. We need to be clearer about options and offer a range of services. The three levels of service should be an array, not a sequence. *National Advocacy Organization*

- We need more flexibility for clients to access services in a non-sequential manner. The current sequence is very challenging for limited-English customers. Non-English speakers are currently less likely to be referred to training, due to the perception that English as a Second Language is their most immediate need. *National Advocacy Organization*
- All participants in our study of One-Stops in our local area were stuck in core and intensive services. Since July 2000 when WIA was implemented locally, 800 ITAs have been established. This is too few for a large city with so much poverty. *Local Advocacy Organization*
- The low number of referrals to community colleges from One-Stops is frustrating. WIA's "Work-First" emphasis and required service sequence are barriers. One-Stops should be able to refer customers, especially TANF recipients, to training immediately if needed. *National Association*
- "Work-First" pressures steer TANF clients away from training opportunities. *National Association*
- Expedite training for customers with skill needs. *One-Stop Partner: Adult Education*
- Persons with disabilities can't get past core services. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- Remove the process-oriented nature of the tiered service structure. There is misinterpretation of how people can access training. *Local Government*

Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)

- Extensive reporting requirements discourage providers from participating, since some lack the money and expertise to find the information required to comply. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- Many pre-WIA providers are opting out of the new system. WIA needs to make it easier for training providers to participate. For example, limit WIA tracking requirements to WIA-funded participants. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Certification of ETPs should include community colleges and apprenticeships. *Union Representative*
- We need to monitor training much more closely. Consumer choice assumes a lot of consumer information about training providers. Our local system hasn't yet passed any information about provider success rates to consumers. *Local Advocacy Organization*
- The requirements for ETPs are burdensome and duplicative. The heaviest burden is the requirement to collect data on all students, not just WIA participants. *National Association*
- The mechanics of informed customer choice are not working and have instead limited customer choice. While assuring informed customer choice, Local Boards should be allowed to waive the ETP requirements where it makes sense. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

- It is hard to access Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). *National Association*
- ITAs can be used with non-traditional training providers on the job, not just in class. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Make Ticket-to-Work providers automatically qualify for ETPs. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Service delivery methods are anti-free enterprise and discourage entrepreneurial innovation. The system is not set up for many service providers to participate. *Business*
- We are losing good training vendors due to reporting requirements. *Local Government*

Youth Programs

- Require One-Stop centers to have special focus on youth. Many are intimidating and inaccessible to youth. WIA should require expertise for youth at each One-Stop or have youth One-Stops. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Expand the access and reach of youth development aspects of WIA youth programs. *National Advocacy Organization*
- People are not applying for WIA youth funds due to performance requirements. *One-Stop Partner: Youth*
- Eliminate the distinction between older and younger youth. *One-Stop Partner: Youth*
- You can only get what the system can deliver. We need to build capacity in agencies providing youth services. *One-Stop Partner: Youth*
- Provide universal access for core services to youth. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Apply lessons from the Youth Opportunity and Rewarding Youth Achievement grants to connect the WIA youth elements under a youth development strategy. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

Eligibility Determination

- Focusing on low-income youth is good because it correlates with unemployment, but the eligibility criteria are overly restrictive. The current threshold, 70% of the Lower Level Income Standard, excludes youths who have 2 parents working at minimum wage. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Too much documentation (six months of income statements) is required to verify youths' income status. This dissuades people from participating in programs. Why not use prior-year tax returns, or base eligibility on participation in the free or reduced school lunch program? Using these existing indicators would increase access. *National Advocacy Organization*

- Approve technical amendments to allow youth eligibility based on participation in the National School Lunch Program. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

Youth Councils

- Expand mandatory Youth Council membership. The foster youth and child welfare systems should be formal members and coordinate with Chaffee Foster Youth Independence Act programs. Education should also participate as formal partner. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Require state youth councils in every state. Currently only 15 states have one. *National Advocacy Organization*

Recruiting and Serving Out-of-School Youth

- Include a small funding set-aside for educators to recruit out-of-school youth to WIA programs. *National Advocacy Organization*
- If you are worried about retaining out-of-school youth, don't eliminate the Youth Opportunity Grants—it is the only program focusing on this population. Some grantees are struggling, but they are only two years into the program. *One-Stop Partner: Youth*

Top-Priority Changes to WIA

- More flexibility is needed in changing boundaries of local areas. I would urge relaxing the extreme difficulty that governors have in realigning the SDAs. The system assumes that once boundaries are set, it's static. But that's not true. WIA talks about flexibility. All states' demographics are changing, so local workforce investment area boundaries are going to have to change. This would lead to more real-time awareness of workforce needs. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- One-Stops are centralizing services, which causes organizational sprawl and lack of mission definition, and encroaching on private sector responsibilities. *Business*

Other Issues

Performance Measures

- Performance measures of TANF and WIA should be similar to help with coordination. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Modify performance standards. Youth offenders and out-of-school youths are harder to work with, so the current standards lead to “creaming” that excludes these customers. Texas has adopted a regression model to incorporate different individual circumstances. *National Advocacy Organization*

- For youth programs, refocus and broaden performance expectations to emphasize developmental outcomes such as membership, leadership, and community service. Emphasizing occupation-specific skills and immediate job placement for youth can impede their long-term developmental goals and lead to short-term, low-wage jobs. *One-Stop Partner: Youth*
- WIA reporting requirements are similar but not quite identical to other Federal programs such as Carl Perkins, and state requirements. Multiple reporting requirements present a barrier to provider participation. *National Association*
- Simplify performance reporting. The current measures make no sense to business and don't capture the needed information. *Inter-Governmental Organization*
- Some One-Stops are reluctant to work with hard-to-serve customers due to the performance measures. *One-Stop Partner: Adult Education*
- There should be separate performance standards for persons with disabilities. The WIA regulations said such measures would be developed, but this hasn't happened. Persons with disabilities are told to go elsewhere so that they will not alter One-Stops' performance measures. *Non-Profit Service Provider*
- Better information is needed. Data collected for other purposes doesn't fit. We need a report card across states. *State Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- The performance standards system of 17 measures has to go. We tried asking our staff to flow chart each of those measures. Get incumbent worker training to the point of who gets a job, how much do they make, and is the employer satisfied. Reinforce the emphasis on lifelong learning by removing some eligibility barriers. *Local Government*

TANF Reauthorization

- The TANF proposal should be adjusted to advance education and training options. TANF "success" should be based on employment outcomes, not caseload reduction. *National Advocacy Organization*
- Focus on WIA performance measures (e.g., employment, retention, earnings, etc.), not caseload reduction. *Local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Member*
- TANF should ease restrictions on post-secondary and vocational education and extend the allowable time from 12 to 24 months. *National Association*
- TANF should have greater flexibility to encourage education and training for self-sufficiency, not just lower caseloads. *National Association*
- The Administration's TANF proposals greatly raise the bar of work requirements. This will hurt persons with disabilities, who cost more and take longer to be trained and need more on-the-job supports. *National Advocacy Organization*

Sectoral Initiatives

- WIA should encourage sectoral (industry-specific) training. Our research shows that these programs bring together the needs of employers and low-income workers in a win-win way. *Non-Profit Research Organization*
- The current system is hard for sectoral initiatives to work in. *National Association*
- More resources and flexibility are needed for sectoral training. *Inter-Governmental Organization*

Infrastructure

- We acknowledge that WIA is ambitious and requires a lot of work to implement. Our members want to stay the course because things are just starting to fall into place now. We have great concern that we not prejudice the system. *National Association*

Limited-English Customers

- The population in our local area is 12% Latino, many of whom are refugees who have resided here legally for nearly 20 years. They contribute to the community but are under-served by the One-Stop system. Many come to One-Stops to improve their English, but find that their lack of English skills prevents them from getting served. The Civil Rights Act requires government programs to provide services in the languages of known minorities. *Local Advocacy Organization*
- Community-based organizations (CBOs) cannot be the only source of linguistically competent staff, or else that would create a parallel system. *National Advocacy Organization*

WIA Planning Provisions

- WIA planning provisions should address the need to analyze information on jobs in the local economy and provide it to customers. *National Association*
- DOL should expand sectoral initiatives in WIA and TANF and use WIA technical assistance and planning provisions to expand evaluation projects. *National Association*