

**Summary Notes**  
**2002 Regional Forum on WIA Reauthorization**  
**New York, NY**

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**April 25, 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 Region I, New York, forum was held on April 25, 2002 at the Loews Metropolitan Hotel in New York, New York. A total of 115 participants attended and 27 participants made comments. Also in attendance were representatives from ETA's Regional and National Office and staff from Technical Assistance and Training Corporation (TATC).

The session was introduced as follows:

- **Welcome and Introductions**  
Marilyn Shea, Regional Administrator  
Employment and Training Administration
  
- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**  
Raymond Uhalde, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Employment and Training Administration  
U.S. Department of Labor
  
- **Explanation of Public Comment Process**  
Ed Trumbull, TATC Facilitator

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

27 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 will be submitted as part of the final report to be summarized and analyzed 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

- Business engagement should be demand driven. One of the main problems is the lack of partner contributions received. This means that the money used for low wage progression money is adult program money that comes from the same pot which funds all universal access services. There is not enough money available to build and support the entire One-Stop system. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- There are too many reluctant public partners on the WIBs. The workforce investment system should enable businesses to act and think like businesses rather than forcing them to act like government. Further, it is difficult to physically get members together. Cost sharing MOUs have done immense destruction. They drive people away and have added no value to either businesses or job seekers. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- The processes involved with WIA, from Board formation to the reporting requirements for training providers, are too bureaucratic for the private sector. A revised Act should have as few bureaucratic hurdles as possible. *Policy Analyst*
- Employers have never really been as involved as they should have been. A majority of businesses do not know anything about the workforce investment system, or if they do participate, do not like the system. Employers find the system political and bureaucratic. They also find that the system does not meet their needs by failing to provide employable candidates. *Employer Constituent*
- A report on the National Association of Manufacturer's website states that last year, employers found the most serious workforce problem to be filling front-line worker positions. The tight labor market at that time forced employers to turn to the welfare system to find additional workers. People would come to work with the minimum entry-level skills needed. *Employer Constituent*
- Conduct more research on how employers view this system. Also work to establish pilot projects and develop the infrastructure to engage employers within these kinds of programs. Focus outreach on big-name employers, but remember that the bulk of employment in this area comes from small and medium businesses. *Employer Constituent*

## II. Governance/State Flexibility

- The diversity of the governance structure should be recognized. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*

### Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- New York has used the flexibility of WIA to develop a strong leadership role in the creation and ongoing improvement of the workforce development system. However, the flexibility sought cannot be provided because of statutory limits. New York State is

looking at what type of flexibility can be achieved through statutory change. *State Government Staff*

- WIA and TANF have the shared goal of achieving employment opportunities and economic self-sufficiency for its customers. Despite this commonality, differences in definitions and eligibility rules make effective collaboration extremely difficult. Compatible definitions must be created, or flexibility should be granted to states and localities to determine their own definitions. Increased flexibility will enable them to provide a greater range of services to the universal population. *Local Government Staff*
- Local areas should be granted flexibility in determining what is an allowable work activity. The system should allow local areas to create a more holistic and comprehensive service plan that is in line with local economic factors and circumstances. *Local Government Staff*
- Funding for WIA must be increased so that all who need services can reach them. New York will find it difficult to work with the funding cuts proposed by the Bush administration. *Advocate*
- County Welfare Agencies (CWA) and the WIA referral process should be examined. Real monies should be allocated to these systems. *Local Government Staff*
- There is not enough funding in the system to construct and maintain the second-change system for persons with disabilities it was designed to be. *Employer Constituent*

### **Comments Regarding Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership**

- Local communities should have the opportunity to request waivers from WIB representation requirements. New York has a high number of mandated partners and a large number of non-profit representatives and government appointees. However, because the law requires a minimum participation requirement of 51% from the private sector, the minimum size of a typical New York Board will be about 40 members; this is too large to discuss policy. *Policy Analyst*
- Adequate research is needed on the local level. It is difficult for Boards to evaluate the success of the strategies that they develop. For example, there are issues around what kinds of education Boards fund. Without some form of data gathering, other than how many got placed and what wages they achieved, it is difficult for Boards to determine what strategies have been successful. Money needs to be allocated locally for research. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- To really improve the WIA, we need to look at employment service and how it can come under the direction of the Workforce Boards and the chief elected officers. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

- If it is really going to be a private-sector led Board, business needs to be approached for their input. Input should be gathered from both current Board members, as well as members who have walked away from the table. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- Boards would like the flexibility to serve the client. In order to accomplish this, Boards should be established as 501(c)3s that have flexibility, freedom, and a connection with the private sector. To have this, they need to be released from the government rules that they are forced to follow. If they have to be under the control of a government agency, it would be wise to keep them under departments of economic development. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

### **Role of U.S. Department of Labor**

- Security for working families depends on having access to services. Creating and retaining decent jobs must be the primary task. The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) was designed to promote and develop the skills and jobs of working people, so it is important that USDOL provide strong leadership in developing ways to rebuild lives and communities. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- USDOL should look at areas where they can cut back on administrative costs so more services can be provided and programs are not eliminated. This should happen on the state and local level as well. For instance, there is a lot of unnecessary documentation that comes out of USDOL. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- It would be beneficial for USDOL to communicate more with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) because there are employment and training programs that HUD manages. Training should be focused in USDOL, and housing should be focused in HUD. The two departments can work better together. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- Hopefully, reauthorization will bring greater coordination between USDOL, HHS and Justice. The critical population that we all have to encounter and deal with is that group of individuals coming home from prison. They are potential workers. It has been proven that when you give an ex-offender a job, they are less likely to commit a crime again. It is also more likely that they will pay child support, and meet their other responsibilities. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

### **General Comments Regarding Flexibility and Governance**

- WIA implementation has been a big problem for the large urban areas, becoming a much larger technical challenge than anticipated. Cost allocation and resource sharing has been a burden for the state in their implementation efforts. Guidance from the regional office has also been inconsistent and untimely. *State Government Staff*

### III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

#### Partnership

- Mandatory partners are not needed. Increasing the number of mandatory number of partners will impede their involvement and further divert the role of the Boards from the policy-making functions. *State Government Staff*
- The city's One-Stop system should provide the framework through which TANF and WIA services are provided in order to prevent future dependencies on TANF subsidies. The overall goal is to develop a service-driven, seamless system for all of New York, including providing a single point of entry for disabled workers and youth. By bringing TANF into the One-Stops, the system will be assisting TANF eligible participants to achieve self-sufficiency. Having both programs together will help bridge the gap between the Welfare-to-Work and entering the workforce in search of long-term employment. We recognize the need to bring together a cohesive system that anyone can take advantage of at any point in his or her career, and a system that works to increase employment retention, upgrade skills, and provide educational enhancements. WIA services should be available to TANF participants to help them meet their career goals. The One-Stop system is looking for greater participation in the private sector and assistance in helping TANF-eligible participants gain greater access to the local labor market. *Local Government Staff*
- TANF is focused on self-sufficiency for those persons receiving welfare benefits. WIA serves everyone. However, there are distinct urban, suburban, and rural needs that need to be considered. *Local Government Staff*
- Recognize the need for greater coordination between TANF and WIA, and that the programs have distinct programmatic and policy goals that neither should sacrifice. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Reauthorization of adult education, welfare reform, and workforce development should be used to connect work-based education programs across systems. Common definitions and common accountability approaches should be looked at. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- We must have an updated Labor Market Information (LMI) system in our employment service agencies throughout the United States. Do not blame businesses for not having developed partnerships with employment service agencies. *Local Government Staff*
- Apprenticeship training needs to be incorporated into the system. Economic development plans should also be tied to WIA. *Local Government Staff*
- Research has indicated that One-Stops struggled to coordinate the roles of current mandated partners. This struggle would worsen if TANF is brought in. Effective case management dictates that TANF and WIA services work in tandem for individuals

eligible to receive services under both programs. Consider making TANF a mandated partner, but require that both partners submit a detailed implementation plan that will outline how the partners will integrate beyond merely co-location. Progress made by TANF clients served under WIA should be measured in terms of work-based self-sufficiency. *David Fischer, Project Director, Center for Urban Future*

### **Education as Partner**

- Education and Vocational Rehabilitation programs should be linked into workforce development using incentives, not mandates. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- The Department of Education should be more involved with the Workforce Development system, and USDOL should more visibly work with them so that communication is visible and training is much more available. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*

## **IV. One-Stop Career Centers**

- The business of the workforce system is to help people reach their personal goals, while the business of the welfare system is to help get individuals and families get off welfare. A transitional jobs program should be in place. One-Stops are best suited to work with people as they move up the career ladder. The Block Grant program should be succeeded by a transitional jobs program. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Vocational Rehabilitation funds should not be used to fund One-Stop offices. One way to connect the systems better is to make the legislation more effective and responsive to those who are legally blind in New York State. *Council Chairman*
- Rural residents lack both the awareness of the One-Stop Centers and the transportation to access them. Furthermore, One-Stop Centers operate only from 9am to 5pm, limiting the number of individuals capable of accessing the services to those who are not required to be at work during those hours. Many One-Stops do not have bilingual staff. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- One-Stops' marketing campaigns should accurately reflect the resources the centers have available. One-Stops advertise accessibility, but are not really accessible. The system should survey One-Stops for physical and mental disability accessibility. Staff should be trained to work with persons with disabilities, including an understanding of medication. Services such as childcare, social security, and counseling should be available at One-Stops. Additional programs on career exploration should be provided for the out-of-school students. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Improve the training of One-Stop staff to improve customer flow. Provide staff with a cheat sheet of partner facts, as neither the staff nor the customers are familiar with partner services. One-Stops should provide a monthly summary of high demand jobs in the area

and the training opportunities and job requirements needed to attain those jobs.  
*Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- Some individuals with disabilities do not want to come to a VESID representative, but want access to general facilities. It is important to communicate requirements.  
*Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- WIA needs to coordinate One-Stop services with various departments and services to help make the whole system smoother. It should not be a revolving door system where people come right back in after they have left. Yet the system does not have the job opportunities available. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

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

No comments were made under this topic.

## **VI. Improved Opportunities for Training**

- New York State has determined that one of the most effective ways to identify necessary training programs and engage the business community in the workforce investment system is through incumbent worker programs. There are a number of ways best practice information relating to private sector involvement can be shared, including working with other entities to disseminate local promising practices throughout the state. There must be a strong demonstration of commitment among federal agencies and across agency lines to eliminate fragmentation. *State Government Staff*
- Increase the number of opportunities for customized training, and work to increase retention and advancement of disadvantaged people. *Employer Constituent*
- Skill and career development should be priorities for the workforce development system. Community colleges, post-secondary programs, and apprenticeship programs offer high quality education and training. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Business partners should outline in their five and ten-year plans what kind of real job vacancies will be available. They should also provide requisites of what will be needed so the workforce development system can work with training providers to prepare for jobs in the future. *Local Government Staff*
- More access to training is needed to build skills in order to gain and keep jobs. Individual Training Accounts should expand the opportunities for training, but current

mechanisms are not really filling the need. The training selection process is cumbersome and performance is based on six-month old wage records. The system is unable to respond to rapid changes. Businesses, particularly small businesses, need flexible training dollars to respond to the business' needs. The system also needs to train new and incumbent workers. Individuals need expanded access to and a choice of training to provide viable options. When reauthorized, WIA should consider relaxing existing regulations in order to provide more training, and should encourage service providers to prioritize workers who need skill training. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

- WIA needs to have more allocations of funds and provide academic remediation. It is important to train individuals before sending them to work. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

### **Providers**

- Many of the best training providers either cannot or do not participate. Many smaller non-profits are sometimes insufficiently staffed, and larger organizations are often burdened with different reporting requirements for each agency. It is not worth it for providers to track outcomes for all students in a class because a single student is from WIA. It is worth looking to modify the Act to support these training providers. *Policy Analyst*

### **Participation Rates**

- There is concern about the participation rates required by the new administration which fears that this increase in rates will lead to a philosophy of “work only,” and, by not highlighting education and training, will construct additional barriers to moving up the ladder. This will not relieve the tax burden on local and state officials. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*

### **Adults**

- There is concern about the Title II programs. The Department of Education should be more involved, and should participate in these kinds of meetings. The Adult Education and Literacy Act supports Basic Adult Education for marginalized laborers facing barriers in language, literacy, communication and information processing skills. Many programs outlined in WIA require an individual to have these basic skills in order to take advantage of the WIA programs. At the New York Public Library, there are literacy programs supported by WIA. Most of the students are employed and have low levels of literacy and language skills. Programs are open-ended and flexible to help individuals take advantage of the opportunities. They recognize that workers are constantly facing changing employment opportunities and must deal with child-care related expenses. The flexibility of the programs enables individuals to drop in and out of programs as necessary. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- Education should be the top priority, but Adult Education has been a marginalized field. The programs need more full time employees and a long-term commitment for education support. People involved in Adult Education are committed professionals. We need them, the best and the brightest, to bring up marginalized workers so they can take advantage of the available programs. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Post-employment training services are needed. Many welfare recipients are currently in temporary, low-wage employment. The Work-First program does not really help people move up the career ladder. Furthermore, there are barriers to work that need to be addressed, including childcare. Bush's proposal for work requirements and case loads will lead states to create more work-first programs rather than focusing on training; this approach would be disastrous. *Advocate*
- The need for employment and training assistance is great. Many individuals who lost their jobs immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup> were hotel workers, including former welfare recipients who suddenly found themselves unemployed again. The social safety net is strained, as are emergency food programs. According to GAO, training services with WIA have been limited. Most of the funding has gone to WIA infrastructure instead of training. There are trainers willing to train if they know what is needed. Training should meet the requirements of particular jobs. Customers should go through assessments before accessing training. *Advocate*
- One of the main focuses of the workforce system should be getting people to go back to school. We should not be talking about work-first when there are people who function at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels. We need to look at the fact that training must be a priority in some cases. The system should look at what different colleges can offer. Two and four-year colleges and private institutions should demonstrate that they can teach real skills and give some kind of certification or degree. This should count for something. *Local Government Staff*

## **Youth**

- The Boards tend to serve the children who are in schools or who are readily accessible, maybe through the YMCA. The people who claim to work with the children do not really connect or seek out the children. Many of the children require some guidance. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

## **Public Libraries**

- The city's Public Library was awarded a WIA grant, and managed to register 600 students for the most recent cycle of courses. Some students are employed, some are immigrants, and some are looking to improve their English skills. Libraries should stay involved, as they have a role in educating and informing the public, and are a good resource for finding jobs online and information on careers. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

## VII. Other Comments

### Performance Measures

- One-Stop performance is misaligned. There is not enough flexibility locally. Performance should be fixed to allow for credit for core services and repeat usage. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*

### TANF Reauthorization

- Poor families fare better using welfare assistance than working. Rural Black and Hispanic youth remain under-served. A change must be made to ensure self-sufficiency. The system should remain funded at the national level and should double farmworker program allocations. This program prevents stretching thin the TANF systems and providers job placement assistance to individuals with limited English skills. It is important to increase academic skills before focusing on job-specific skills. States cannot deliver services without the support of national programs. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Some of the flexibility within the system is cast aside by some of the administration's new policies. Work-First can sometimes be translated to "training-never." The new TANF requirements will force states and cities into a one-size-fits-all model to emphasize work. This framework can stigmatize workers more than dependency ever did. More flexibility is needed in both TANF and WIA. *Policy Analyst*

### Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers

- Elimination of the National Farmworkers Job Program would destroy an infrastructure that provides access to many critical services. These services contribute to training and employment retention but are not funded by DOL. Additionally, DOL would be moving away from the goals of other agencies by phasing out the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker program. The Center for Disease Control recently funded four national HIV prevention projects focusing on the migrant workers. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Few parties have access to rural workers. Without an intense outreach effort on the part of One-Stop Centers, rural residents and farmworkers will not be able to utilize the services. With the proposed elimination of the 167 Program, the workforce system needs to be prepared to deal with this customer base. The clients have multiple barriers to employment, including language skills, and low education grade levels. Support services are needed. Service providers want to provide the service but lack the incentive to do so because of the high performance standards passed on from the State to the Local Boards, that are in turn passed on to local service providers. Service providers also face issues of funding and flexibility. There are no guarantees that the clients will stay in the area when

they are trained, and the partners risk not being compensated by the Boards.

*Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- Would like to support keeping the farmworker program in place for the next generation.  
*Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- A customer that was a farmworker, and used to work more than 12 hours a day, is currently receiving training to get a better job. The program continues to individuals like these. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- As a special population, farmworkers provide food and nutrition for the country and the world. This population is extremely important. Individuals in this community conquer incredible barriers to learn English, to become citizens, and to escape economic and political persecution. Farmworkers do not have the privilege to go and find assistance, but rather depend on money allocated from a national level. Program money should continue coming from the national level as opposed to the state level. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Migrant workers are only looking for support. By eliminating the farmworker program, WIA is taking on the responsibility to provide this support. How will the workforce investment system serve these additional people, particularly when it will include overcoming barriers, including language. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*

## **Unions**

- Unions will continue to seek a strong voice in the education, training and economic development systems in their communities. WIA is still a system in transition, and to a large extent, unproven in its ability to provide training and support to workers who need to obtain self-sufficiency. Union involvement can help transform WIA into an instrument for developing high-wage, high-skill jobs, instead of a revolving door of low-wage, low skill jobs. It must be universally available, publicly administered, and fully funded. Unions will continue to oppose any effort to privatize public delivery systems. The AFL/CIO is committed to the public workforce and to a program that builds family-sustaining jobs. They help connect individuals to career ladders and high-growth companies. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

## **Infrastructure**

- There is a need to transform the alignment of the workforce investment system at all levels, including accountability systems, funding mechanisms, and management. *State Government Staff*
- System building takes time and the basic structure is good. WIA should be focused on preparing all youth and adults for jobs and careers. Many of the restrictions the system has are due to limited eligibility for funding. Cost allocation is a major issue that has created more division than partnerships. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*

## Persons with Disabilities

- Persons with disabilities present a reservoir of talent that can help the New York State economy. The bureaucracy has not improved, and the legislation was not written with consumers in mind. The legislation should consist of a greater target for employing people with disabilities. *Council Chairman*

## General Comments

- The system should look to help persons once incarcerated and find a way to implement a federal bonding program into WIA and TANF. The system should also do more to help the non-custodial parent. Many young men and women who have been incarcerated could turn their lives around if given a second chance. *Local Government Staff*
- To make the Workforce Investment Act relevant and constructive, the system needs to take action. WIA has had little impact on how employment services are delivered in New York. The city's lone One-Stop does not compare to the services provided by the non-profit and for-profit training providers in terms of customers served, and the business community has hardly taken advantage of the system at all. The city's official policy of extreme work-first policy had little use for the more nuanced approach of WIA. To make the Act truly relevant for job seekers and employers, action needs to be taken above what city agencies can do. This is where WIA reauthorization should be able to address some of the concerns. *Policy Analyst*
- This system can fail. Have used the services personally, but did not receive all of the help needed. Was not qualified for training programs due to possession of a degree. Could not find the childcare needed to support school and a job. As a result, is not surprised to hear that people do not want to get off of welfare. A person can make more money on the system than they do making \$6.50/hr. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- WIA replaced a program in Indiana that had taught budgeting skills, how to advocate on the job for benefits, and how to find a good job. WIA does not provide assistance with the essentials, particularly childcare. This impacts single parents most of all. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- State and Local Areas have different problems and different needs. Uniform regulations should not be applied. Both WIA and TANF programs require additional components to comply with performance measures. More flexibility is needed to administer funds and train the workforce, particularly when the unemployment rate increases. It is frustrating to not be able to provide jobs. Temporary employment opportunities exist. They just need to be found and made available. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*