

Summary Notes
2002 Regional Forum on WIA Reauthorization
Worcester, MA

April 22, 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 first of two Region I, Boston area, forums was held on April 22, 2002 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts. A total of 77 participants attended and 19 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**
Stephen Willand, Ph.D., Executive Director
Central Massachusetts Regional Employment Board
- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**
Bob 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.

19 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 testimony 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

- Reconsider growing workforce investment areas. Bigger is not better. The more an area expands, the less likely the business community will be able to keep their voice. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- The business community must be more engaged. Training is the common ground between labor unions and employees, and businesses should spend as much time lobbying for training and education funds as they do for reduced taxes. *Union Representative*
- Businesses bid on WIA funding to make money. WIA should not be a system to provide cheap and fast labor. When unemployment is low, the structure of Jobs First met the needs of the economy a bit better. The program then lifted the cap on older workers to bring in additional employees. When that still did not meet the need, the program lowered the age limit for youth. This system needs to remain a public system and needs to have individuals under the Wagner-Peyser and UI system be served by merit staff because they are bound by privacy requirements. They are held accountable while the private sector is not. No evidence exists to support claims of cost efficiency through the private sector. Business will not come into the system until they have control of training. *Labor Agency Representative*
- Invest in employer outreach. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

II. Governance/State Flexibility

- We are all agreed that the decisions made at the federal level determine priority. However, decisions need to be made at the level of interaction. More happens at the local level than others, and often the locals do not have the support of the state. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*

Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- States need more flexibility in using TANF workforce dollars. The system should combine expertise across agencies and programs to more effectively utilize the counseling, placement, and retention services. Flexibility should be written into the law. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- WIA is being implemented in ways that threaten the stability of community-based networks. Formal allocation of funds does not give service providers the resources they can use well, while other states struggle to spend WIA funds. More mechanisms should be in place to adjust allocations based on demonstrated capacity to meet workforce training needs. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*

- The public workforce development system is woefully under-funded. It promotes universal access, but does not provide the resources to adequately serve all customers. Leadership and increased support from DOL is essential, as is lifelong learning. The duration and intensity of education and training services directly relates to success, and the system should provide longer and more intense skill training. More training capacity and funding is needed to support mobility and provide opportunities for people in entry-level positions. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*
- Categorically funded programs and funding silos still dominate the workforce development system on federal and state levels. Individual career centers and individual providers of training are the ones to integrate funding streams. State and federal officials should be more responsible for developing an integrated system. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*
- Discrepancies in funding are based on employment rates. One-Stop Career Centers are a great part of the law and should be maintained. The centralized structure is good. Having some money set aside to run these centers is critical to high quality. It is important to reconsider exactly how much funding is needed to maintain the infrastructure and the day-to-day activities of the One-Stop Center. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*
- Too much money is spent on infrastructure, leaving an insufficient amount for training. A cyclical discussion of what comes first is not productive. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*
- Maintain adequate funding for WIA programs. This is particularly critical in the program's early years. As knowledge of the WIA system increases, and more former TANF recipients enter the workforce, a greater demand will be placed on the workforce system. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- Flexibility in program administration should be given to states to provide the workforce system with the ability to respond to diverse local needs. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- A flexible and comprehensive workforce system that is understandable and responsive to all job seekers, students, etc. is needed. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- One of the major changes proposed under WIA concerns flexibility offered through WIA. 18 months into implementation, Massachusetts agreed that the rhetoric did not match reality. Funding was tied to specific purposes making it difficult for state and local entities to adjust to trends. Members of the State WIB say that major changes should include more flexible funding at state and local levels. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

- WIA is under-funded. It should provide services for populations regardless of the existing unemployment rate. Currently, the situation is such that the lower the unemployment rate, the lower the funding. Large reductions make it difficult to provide a continuity of services. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- A decrease in demand has reduced the pressure on employers to participate in the system. We are facing a long-term issue in the development of a skilled workforce. The current structure of funding provides the Boards with few resources to meet the training needs of newly hired and incumbent workers. These funds are very limited and should be targeted in a more flexible manner. *Business Liaison*
- Funding under WIA is not done in real time. It is not the case that people are under-spending. Rather it is a matter of putting money where it is needed. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Comments Regarding Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership

- Clarify the roles of the Local WIBs and the state in certification of vendors to ensure that the LWIB's approval of vendors derives the eligible vendor list. Local WIBs and chief elected officials should have more responsibility in shaping WIA programs. Increase vendor certification requirements so they can be held accountable. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Pay attention to the quality of the Boards. A high-level staffed, private-sector dominated Board designed to work in conjunction with a chief elected official is critical to success. Boards will attract and retain real private-sector investment and involvement if the Board's duties involve making real decisions, instead of listening to long bureaucratic discussions. Chief elected officials need to be equals and like-minded. It would be problematic to have a Board fighting the direction of the mayor or county official or vice versa. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*

III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

Partnership

- TANF should be a mandatory partner and One-Stops should be the central point for all services. Businesses like a single point of contact. They like the ability to make only one phone call to find the services they need. They like the system because it is much more effective under WIA. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- The notion of state and local partnerships that operate under WIA, including the collaboration of equals between Local WIBs and Career Center operators, should be supported. Further, the complete integration of the Wagner-Peyser program has

contributed to the success of the One-Stop system. *Representative of State Government Agency*

- TANF should be a required partner. In our experience with the Department of Transitional Assistance, the concept of partnerships envisioned here under WIA becomes a reality. They provide funds through a performance-based contract, supporting the provision of intensive job development and job search services for TANF recipients. As an early implementer of the One-Stop System, we have provided funding for direct placement services as part of the funding stream for career centers. The statewide average is about 3,400 placements for TANF over the past five years. Career Centers know they must meet their goals to receive funding. The inclusion of TANF as a partner in Massachusetts has been essential to providing a true One-Stop System to customers. The blending of the resources of both agencies will enable better services for both customers. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- The mandate needs to require some financial support from partners. Further, expanding targeted services to specific populations will help achieve the goal of integration. *Representative of State Government Agency*
- Some of the qualities of a successful workforce development system include a strong relationship between a chief elected official and the WIB, private sector leadership and majority on the WIB, senior level decision makers appointed to the Board, One-Stop Centers as the central service provider, year-round youth programs, and universal access for core services and training programs. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Strengthen partnerships with Wagner-Peyser and TANF programs. Do not mandate partnerships with non-TANF programs, but provide incentives to HHS and HUD programs to participate. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- It is important that the Workforce and the Health and Human Services systems work closely to meet the employability needs of TANF recipients, but it is essential that they each maintain their own specialization. One-stop shopping for all things will dilute the goal of helping people transition from welfare-to-work. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Department of Transition Services uses the workforce system as the primary service delivery system. They have used Welfare-to-Work money to create capacity at career centers for employer compatibility assessments for TANF recipients. The programs have been successful, but are running out of money. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- We need to figure out nationally how to provide universal access between WIA and TANF. TANF recipients should be just like everyone else that comes in for services. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*

- Any changes taking place on the reauthorization of TANF will affect WIA. For states to make these programs a success, they need to develop a workforce structure where training and educational activities are readily accessible. Collaboration between education, human resources, and economic development services, including a strong collaboration on local levels between the private and public sectors, is needed to build a strong workforce development system. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- Improve alignment and streamlining among federal programs to eliminate barriers to effective service delivery. Differences in definitions, planning and reporting requirements, accountability measures, and use of funds raise challenges for the One-Stop system. Federal partner agencies should develop a jointly-integrated system to align federal systems to consistently encourage support for integrated program participation. Other issues that should be addressed include common management and performance, cost sharing, and resource allocation. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- Continue the dialogue with Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies to make partnering a reality. DOL should also continue to support the work done by business-led Local WIBs, which should continue to be the focal point of the system. The system needs to meet the specific needs of the labor market. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Administrative commonalities between WIA and TANF can be extremely productive. A large number of TANF leavers spend time working but then return. The closer the systems can get, the better. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- TANF should be a mandated partner. However, if the current administration proposal passes as TANF, we need to pay attention and not let it go to extremes. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- Our partners need to pay to be a part of the One-Stop system. Few partners have come to the table with dollars in hand. Legislation needs to be modified to require them to pay and be involved. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- WIA and TANF should look outside the box for other agencies that they could work with, including AmeriCorp. Through AmeriCorp, stipends do not replace other benefits individuals receive while on welfare. At the end of AmeriCorp these individuals have money to put towards school in the future. Further, they can step into sustainable jobs. They develop a better understanding of the school systems and develop skills to teach their own kids. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

Job Retention and Advancement

- Federal law should establish a grant program similar to Welfare-to-Work that would allow Local Boards and CEOs to create models that address retention, skills development, and wage gains for TANF recipients. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- TANF law should put as much emphasis on retention and wage gains as is currently put on participation rates. Accountability for results in these areas will drive program design and spending. Career centers should be funded to provide in-depth employability assessment services so that referrals can be made to those programs that will address that individual's employability issues. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- To improve job retention, we need to develop more skills that are of greater benefit to workers and employers. Greater attachment to the labor market is directly related to additional skill training and skill gain. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*

IV. One-Stop Career Centers

- Universal access works. In Portland, Maine, we will have more than 16,000 individuals register for services and more than 9,000 people use our One-Stop Center this year. It works because businesses like having a single point of contact and use the One-Stops for their staffing services. The One-Stop Center has eliminated the stigma of being a Welfare-to-Work office. Businesses actively engage the One-Stop in hiring. However, the One-Stop is unable to report that they are sufficiently funded to cover universal access. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Support of Local WIBs and One-Stop Centers, the cornerstones of the workforce development system, should continue. The One-Stop Career Center will no doubt continue to be a model for other similar systems. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Career Centers are our point of services, and our public face. Front-line staff are continually challenged to provide services to an ever-changing customer base. For purposes of both capacity building and systems building, these staff need support in the form of tools, knowledge, leadership and knowledge. The funds, expertise, models and tools are not always there. These tools must be put in place during reauthorization so we can continue to build the system. Currently, the majority of funds provide support for infrastructure, a fact that makes it difficult to provide the necessary tools. This requires a greater effort at the national level. Fortunately, the on-line career center best practices website project is currently underway. One-Stop Managers should not have to reinvent the wheel if all of the necessary information on creating a One-Stop is readily available. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (Dislocated Workers)*

- A substantial investment was made to develop and implement the Massachusetts One-Stop Employment System, which is used by all partners. The system provides all the Title I and Title III services. It also eliminates duplication that existed prior to the implementation of WIA. *Representative of State Government Agency*

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

- Massachusetts provides the bulk of Unemployment Insurance services through call centers, but also put UI staff in the One-Stop Career Centers. The UI program is uniquely positioned to encourage claimants to get people to use services. The UI program also provides additional resources to support the operation of the career center. *Representative of State Government Agency*

VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

General Comments on Training and Training Providers

- Expand the concept of universal access to include training. It is important to reach out to the underemployed so they can access career change and training services in order to move up in the career ladder. It is important to match business services to training so that incumbent workers can also take advantage of them in order to move up within an organization. The system should provide more incentives for business to match employer contributions for training. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- There is a gap between the need for and the supply of training and service providers. The landscape is still dominated by the missing capacity to respond to market needs. Further, we do not yet have an actual workforce development system, a situation that makes it difficult for individuals to get out of poverty. It also provides problems for education and training providers. The lack of sensible organization makes it difficult for low-income residents and community residents to identify their resources. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*
- Continued opportunities for learning should be lifelong training programs, and should also be provided to former TANF recipients. Additional flexibility in sequencing of training should be provided to ensure that individuals can be quickly trained. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (TANF)*
- Community colleges are well positioned to provide quality training for all levels of the employed or unemployed. WIA must recognize the unique contributions they can make. Community colleges are supported by state, local and private funding that can be leveraged to provide more training at more acceptable costs. Therefore they can provide more training through economies of scale. They can also offer collaborations with business and industry to meet their needs. They are conveniently located and offer

flexible class schedules. They are open to all students. A percentage of funds should be set aside for community college courses, and they should be recognized through funding support as providing services similar to those of the One-Stop. *Business Liaison*

- Community colleges should be exempt from complying with the WIA report card. Most community colleges are approved prior to being offered as a training provider. They are accredited agencies and have therefore already endured many of the quality checks. They ensure their programs are current with the field. WIA funds should be treated like Pell Grants in colleges. *Business Liaison*
- Reauthorization for both WIA and TANF should be moved to a balance-approach model. Many participants need basic skills training before they can obtain specific employment training. *Business Liaison*
- Under WIA, cumbersome reporting requirements of vendors make customer choice less a reality. Training providers should be encouraged to participate even if used sparingly. Requirements reduce flexibility and the capacity of WIA to meet customer needs. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Some sort of employer training grant would be useful. There is not a direct resource used to address training needs. The system should permit employer choice of training providers and provide resources to upgrade worker skills. There is an ongoing need for basic skills, including basic English and math skills. Federal funds could be targeted to lower-wage individuals and be a resource in leveraging more corporate dollars. Once employers are involved with the system, they tend to provide more of their own resources for training. *Business Liaison*
- The system should support a strategy of working through employer associations. It provides an excellent way to provide training for a higher number of employers. Employers' business circumstances change over time, and the strategy of using other employers to meet objectives of a grant would be good. *Business Liaison*
- The ability to learn from existing Welfare-to-Work programs should be emphasized. Additionally, programs that work effectively with welfare programs should be considered. Training models that seem to work well have a great deal of support, case management, opportunities for support services, and long-term engagement with the client. Assistance may be required for access to work. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Encourage continued consideration for first-job services and help individuals move from one job to another as their skills improve. An example of such a program is a continued literacy program. Employer partnerships are critical because these programs work best when they are workplace focused. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- The attrition of providers within the WIA system is of concern. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- Useful outcomes would result from increased accountability standards. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Additional and better access to services is needed to assist women to find the jobs they need. There is a lack of integration and coordination within the system. However, unless education and training is a viable option, it does not matter how coordinated and integrated programs are. It is essential to enable workers to upgrade their skills while working. There are significant benefits to children if mothers have access to more education. Further, it is cost effective to provide these opportunities. Women who pursue community college education apply for the same kinds of financial aid that other students get. They also take out loans. But they need support to enable them to support their families. When you consider that TANF and DOL funds are paying between \$2,500 and \$5,000 per individual for training alone, it is clear that assistance with community college is cost effective. Pell grant recipients must maintain a 2.5 GPA, so accountability is built in. The community college structure has a developed infrastructure to support these activities. Further, many good community-based programs have childcare centers, counseling, and peer-support groups. More opportunities for education and training prior to entering the workforce should be considered. The voice of low-income women should be involved with the planning of this system. *Representative of Non-Profit Organization*
- The Eligible Trainer Provider List needs serious fixing. It is exclusionary and does not offer services to people without a GED or high school diploma. This eliminates about 25% of people in our area and further restricts customer choice. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

National Emergency Grants

- Take a look at the National Emergency Grant process. There has to be a faster turnaround if funds are to be used for dislocated workers. Business comes to the workforce system for rapid response and for layoff assistance. Therefore, we need to have funds to retrain those workers. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*
- National grants are non-responsive because of the time delay in filing. By the time you assess dislocation, obtain documentation, submit a grant, and wait for a response, you lose people to the low-wage market system without providing individuals with an opportunity for retraining. *Labor Agency Representative*
- National emergency grants need faster turnaround times. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

Adult Programs

- Integrate adult basic education programs in the system. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Part-time work and learning programs should be developed to help develop foundational skills. Encourage use of funds for post-placement education training. To make this work, services should be offered at a convenient time and location. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Increase services for non-custodial parents. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- The Senior Employment Training Program should not be put under this system. Placement measurements are significantly different, as they deal with those partners providing community service and reflect part-time employment. *Labor Agency Representative*

Youth Programs

- Change language regarding out-of-school youth programs to include those involved with adult education programs. Allow school lunch eligibility to be used for eligibility for youth programs. Allow youth funds to be used for ITAs for older youth. Allow self declaration of income to establish eligibility for older youth and adults. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Youth councils are the best thing to ever happen to the system. They need to be supported and strengthened, and considered more than an add-on to what is happening in the workforce system. They need to be given the resources to do their work. Further, youth councils should not be made up of only service providers. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- The ten requirement elements regarding youth should stay. They are based on research and common sense. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

VII. Other Comments

Performance Measures

- The implementation of WIA has had some harmful effects on low-income communities and the service providers in these communities. Performance standards reward local and state services that provide services for the easy-to-serve. This has reduced funding to high-performance career centers, and driven away some potential service providers.

One-Stop Centers face demands to disentangle the requirements of categorical funding.
Representative of State-wide Coalition

- Performance measures are hard to understand and need to be simplified. Business leaders get headaches working with them. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

TANF Reauthorization

- The statement that TANF has moved clients into employment should be changed to reflect that it allows families to be self-sufficient based on the local costs of housing, day-care, medical, food, and transportation costs. Dislocated workers are different from TANF workers. Performance measures are different and the need for core and intensive services differ. Most people should not have to go as a dislocated worker to a job-first mentality. Combining the two programs would be a disservice. *Union Agency Representative*
- Regarding TANF, the need for basic skill upgrading is great. The system needs to focus on skill development. The need for family supports should also be addressed. *Business Liaison*
- The system should also consider working to address both evident and hidden disabilities. A high percentage of TANF recipients have undiagnosed medical problems. The system cannot be passive about serving TANF recipients. Outreach into the communities to educate citizens about the services is essential. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Proposals for TANF reauthorization severely limit training opportunities by raising work requirements to 40 hours per week. *Union Representative*
- We support the Working from Poverty to Promise Act of 2002, HR 4210. It eliminates the 30% cap on caseloads allowed to be engaged and raises the limit on Vocational Rehabilitation training. It counts post-secondary education and participation in work study and internships as allowable work activities. It requires states to assess regional economies and identify growing industries. It also makes poverty reduction the primary goal of TANF. *Union Representative*
- A continued policy dialogue on poverty is missing. The workforce development system is supposed to create pathways to get people out of poverty. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Work-First

- Through a tiered sequence of WIA services, we are too often implementing a training policy of work-first. The effect on local systems has been dramatic. Individuals are

strongly encouraged to take the first job available without taking into consideration the implications of doing so. Training legislation is needed that addresses the need of citizens to obtain family sustaining wages. Developing this kind of workforce development system is in the nation's interest. *Representative of State-wide Coalition*

Vocational Rehabilitation

- Reauthorization should mandate that the Vocational Rehabilitation program, a mandatory partner, have a representative on the State Workforce Investment Board. Vocational Rehabilitation should retain its identity as a public program under the Department of Education while continuing to participate as a partner in all One-Stop Centers. Memorandums of Understanding should be developed with all local Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stops on the coordination of services. Funds provided under Title I should only be used to serve the targeted population of persons with disabilities. They should not be used to support universal access or to cover the costs of making centers accessible. ITA accounts can be limiting to those persons who may need more comprehensive services to be gainfully employed. Employment needs to be consistent with an individual's vocational goal, and it should be documented that the provision of rehabilitation services contributed to the employment outcome. *Union Representative*

Farmworkers

- The proposed budget elimination of WIA Section 167 funding threatens the survival of our 50-member agency that provides training to migrant and seasonal farmworkers. This program is seen as ineffective and duplicative. These views are not based on facts. Every piece of Employment and Training legislation has maintained that this nationally administered program to serve the farmworker population is important. About 90 percent of funds led to full-time, unsubsidized jobs for workers. 100 percent of participants live below the poverty level, yet only eight percent receive any sort of cash benefits. This program is only duplicative if a person is receiving the same services at the same time through two different programs, which is not the case. Funding should be continued and increased under WIA. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization (Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers)*

General Comments

- With more downsizing and plant closings every day, it is important that DOL show strong leadership. Many people are still feeling the economic impact from September 11. We believe in universal service that should be delivered through the State Employment Services and the unions. Many people displaced from low paying jobs have been able to improve their lives through our programs. Factory workers have become professionals in medical fields. We need adequate funding and good jobs to keep America running. These programs are real programs for real people. *Union Representative*