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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

**FUTUREWORKS CAREER CENTER  
SPRINGFIELD, MA**

**One-Stop Profile**

January 1997

Based on a Site Visit Conducted During September 1996

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# **FUTUREWORKS CAREER CENTER SPRINGFIELD, MA One-Stop Profile**

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## **DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

Hampden County is a semi-urban region located midway between Boston and New York. The County is dotted with small cities, towns, and municipalities, including Springfield (the largest town with a population of 155,000 residents), Chicopee, Holyoke, and Ludlow. Industrial production and commercial trade were the mainstays of the region's economy until the late 1980s, when a major recession blanketed much of New England, including Massachusetts. Like other major industrial areas, the structure of the economy has changed drastically since that time. There are now substantially fewer manufacturing jobs and many of the manufacturing jobs that do exist require a high level of technical expertise. Employment opportunities in the retail trade and services sectors are increasing but do not match the wages previously paid in the manufacturing sector. These structural changes in the economy have resulted in a growing mismatch between the education, skills, and work experiences of many local job-seekers and the workforce needs of local employers.

The unemployment rates in the Springfield metropolitan area and Hampden County reflect this mismatch. Although statewide unemployment rates had shrunk to around 4.4% at the time of the evaluation site visit, Hampden County's unemployment stood at 5.1%, and Springfield's at more than 6%. Unemployment remained high, even though the local economy was expanding somewhat. Underemployment was also a concern among Springfield residents.

The FutureWorks Career Center is one of two One-Stop career centers serving residents of Hampden County. Hampden County residents may receive services either from FutureWorks, located in the City of Springfield, or from CareerPoint, a second One-Stop career center located about six miles away in Holyoke.<sup>1</sup> FutureWorks is

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, Massachusetts residents may receive services from any of the state's career centers.

unique in that it is the first One-Stop career center in the state of Massachusetts operated solely by a private for-profit entity.<sup>2</sup>

The selection of Employment and Training Institute, Inc. (ETI)—a private-for-profit firm based in New Jersey—to operate one of the two One-Stop career centers in Hampden County was strongly influenced by the commitment to a “competitive model” by the state of Massachusetts as well as by the members of the Hampden County Regional Employment Board (REB). Both state and regional workforce development planners believed that the introduction of competition into the design and delivery of government programs would revitalize the system, prompt improved performance, and spawn innovation. Moreover, the MassJobs Council wanted to use competition as a way to shift the focus of workforce development programs away from reporting requirements toward meeting customers’ needs. This new focus would, in turn, empower users of the system to make informed choices about how to meet their individual employment or training needs.

As described in the state profile, the MassJobs Council’s vision for a statewide career center system included competition at three levels. First, the 16 Regional Employment Boards in Massachusetts were invited to compete for One-Stop funds based on their proposals for implementing One-Stop Career Center systems in their respective regions. The incentive structure was such that the earlier sites would receive the bulk of funds and would inform the processes in the later implementation sites. The vision of the Hampden County Regional Employment Board was consistent with the state-level vision in its enthusiasm for a transformed system based on a competitive model. As a result, the Hampden County REB was selected by the state as one of four regions to receive first-year implementation grant funding, and one of two regions considered ready to implement an open competitive process to select career center operators and charter and oversee career center operations.

Second, through an open bidding process administered by each selected Regional Employment Board, public agencies, private firms, and community-based organizations would be able to compete for selection as center operators. The Hampden County Regional Employment Board’s request for proposals encouraged bidders to propose

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<sup>2</sup>Several of the One-Stop career centers operating in Massachusetts at the time of the evaluation site visit were operated by consortia in which private sector entities participated, but FutureWorks was the only center operated solely by a private company.

fee-based “enhanced” services that, in combination with required core (free) services would make a full spectrum of workforce development services available to job seekers and employers. The REB also attempted to select different career center operators who would offer contrasting menus of services that would offer a high degree of customer choice. The Hampden County REB also sought center operators that demonstrated creativity in designing workforce development services and a commitment to continuous improvement.

The third level of competition envisioned by the MassJobs Council as part of the new statewide system of career centers was competition between local centers that would compete for the same customer base. Just as Regional Employment Boards were permitted a high degree of latitude in establishing their career center systems, local operators in Hampden County were permitted latitude in developing their vision for the operation of individual centers.

The two entities selected to operate career centers in Hampden County were each encouraged to develop their own areas of expertise. FutureWorks has enjoyed success providing a wide range of enhanced services to the employer community in Springfield, and has since become a major player in economic development and business networks throughout the county. CareerPoint, the second Hampden County career center—operated by a non-profit consortium of public educational institutions, public employment and training agencies, and the local chamber of commerce<sup>3</sup>—has focused on recruiting customers from minority communities.<sup>4</sup> Both centers maintain a high level of contact with each other as well as with the other major education, employment, and training providers in the region. Electronic linkages to a statewide information system are perceived as important in weaving these independent providers into an integrated state system.

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<sup>3</sup>CareerPoint is a private non-profit corporation created through the collaboration of the local Chamber of Commerce, Holyoke Community College, the Department of Employment and Training (whose local office staff previously provided ES, UI, UI profiling and worker reemployment, and TAA/TRA services to Hampden County residents), the Department of Transitional Assistance (whose local offices administering time-limited cash assistance under welfare reform), and the Donahue Institute of the University of Massachusetts.

<sup>4</sup> CareerPoint is located in a predominantly minority community. One of the local partners in the CareerPoint Collaboration—the Chamber of Commerce—had developed a reputation for providing high-quality information and services to minority communities. CareerPoint has benefited from the Chamber’s experience and expertise.

The remainder of this profile focuses on the FutureWorks Career Center operated by ETI. However, it is important to understand that both centers—FutureWorks and CareerPoint—serve the same local community. The two centers are located within several miles of each other, and are available to serve the same job-seeker and employer base. They compete with one another, but they are also partners in fulfilling the needs of job-seekers and employers in Hampden County. The uncertainties of this relationship are indicative of some of the more fundamental questions that have emerged as the state has attempted to implement its controversial approach to redesigning workforce development services.

Several contextual factors have influenced the development and implementation of One-Stop Career Centers in Hampden County. These include (1) the highly charged political environment surrounding the career center system at both the state and local levels; (2) the need for the transformed system to respond to the challenges created by the implementation of welfare reform at the state and local levels; and (3) the structure of the Springfield-area economy and labor market. Each of these is addressed briefly below.

*The implementation of the One stop initiative in Massachusetts has occurred in the context of a highly-charged political environment.* Massachusetts' decision to use a competitive model to transform the public employment system has been surrounded by tremendous controversy. In June 1996, the state legislature attempted to restrict the state's ability to reallocate public funds from other employment and training programs to support the One-Stop initiative. Although the legislative opposition has, to some degree, subsided, career centers throughout the state, including FutureWorks, have come within days of being shut-down. Under a negotiated compromise, career centers in the four regions selected for initial funding will be permitted to continue operations, and ten additional regions will be permitted to plan for future career center implementation, while information about career center effectiveness is collected and reviewed. As a result, the experiences of the career centers in Hampden County are being observed with great interest by partisans on both sides of the issue.

*The state has implemented dramatic changes in its welfare system, introducing both time-limited benefits and widespread work requirements.* The MassJobs Council has been charged with developing a comprehensive strategic plan to assist welfare clients in finding gainful employment. The MassJobs Council and the career center system have been designated as the delivery system that will have the responsibility to

ensure that welfare recipients receive effective job search assistance. Changes in the welfare system at the local level have already impacted the clientele seeking services at the Hampden County career centers.

*The state, including the Springfield area, is emerging from a lengthy and far-reaching recession, exacerbated by sizable reductions in defense industry sales in the late 1980s and early 1990s. After 1988, unemployment in the state of Massachusetts tripled, exceeding 7% by 1990. Since 1991, the state has experienced low, but steady job growth in most sectors, although manufacturing employment has continued to decline, as have employment opportunities in state and federal government agencies and departments. The Springfield area has experienced substantial, if uneven, growth in wholesale and retail trade, and moderate growth in the production and service sectors. A mismatch between the labor need of employers and the skills of job-seekers continues to plague the local economy. As a result both employers and job seekers perceive a need for assistance with the labor-exchange function as well as a need for increased workforce education and training.*

## **DESIGN OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE**

### **Evolution of the Local One-Stop Design**

The design of workforce development services at the FutureWorks Career Center has been influenced by the state's vision of a competitive system, by the Regional Employment Board's interpretation of that vision, and by the ability of the FutureWorks staff and management, with the strong support of the Regional Employment Board, to effectively combine workforce development theory and high-performance workplace practice.

The state vision, as described above and in the state One-Stop profile, calls for the delivery of integrated customer-driven services by center operators that are selected through a competitive process managed by Regional Employment Boards. As described in the One-Stop profile for the State of Massachusetts, federal block grant legislation was expected to create an integrated funding stream to support the delivery of workforce development services by a statewide network of One-Stop career centers. In the absence of federal block grant legislation, the state Career Center Office has negotiated "Interdepartmental Services Agreements" with the state agencies responsible for administering Employment Services, Title III services for dislocated workers, welfare-to-work services, vocational rehabilitation, services for the blind, employment services for individuals with mental health disabilities, and adult education services for

the allocation of agency funds for the operation of One-Stop career centers.<sup>5</sup> Only a small amount of JTPA Title II funds for services to economically disadvantaged adults and youth was available for career center operations during the first implementation year, because JTPA two-year service delivery contracts were already underway.

In Hampden County, the Regional Employment Board expressed great interest in and enthusiasm for innovation in the reengineering of workforce development services. Although the Hampden County REB's request for proposals identified the minimum services that a center operator would be required to provide to job-seekers and employers, it also encouraged bidders to propose fee-based "enhanced services in order to make a "full spectrum of workforce development services available to job-seekers and employers in the county. As described previously, the REB envisioned that the operators of the two career centers would develop contrasting menus of services to increase overall customer choice.

The Regional Employment Boards in Massachusetts received initial funding to plan and implement career centers from the MassJobs Council. However, over time, they are expected to become self-supporting. Some REBs have opted to generate operating expenses by requiring center operators to "pay" a fee (e.g., \$100,000, which would be deducted from the operator's start-up funds) in exchange for the charter to operate a One-Stop career center. Rather than imposing a chartering fee, the Hampden County REB requires that center operators share a proportion of the fees generated from enhanced services with the REB. It is unclear whether these arrangements will be sustained over time.

Finally, the Hampden County Regional Employment Boards sought operators that demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the state's vision for the future of workforce development services in Massachusetts. The Board was interested in operators that could demonstrate creativity in approaching workforce development issues and a commitment to continuous improvement. Just as the REBs were permitted a high degree of latitude in establishing their visions of local career center systems, the selected career center operators were also permitted latitude in developing their visions

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<sup>5</sup> Massachusetts has developed a statewide automated telephone system for taking applications for UI benefits that is operated separately from the career centers. At the two career centers in Hampden County, staff viewed this as a positive development, because it enabled the career centers to differentiate themselves from the old system of "unemployment offices" and to market themselves as brokers of career education and career development assistance.

for the operations of individual centers. The Hampden County REB had no preconceived ideas about particular types of services associated with particular operators, but placed a great deal of emphasis on operator capacity for innovation.

The proposal submitted by ETI for the operation of the FutureWorks Career Center articulated a vision consistent with that of MassJobs Council and the Hampden REB. In its proposal, ETI/FutureWorks evidenced a commitment to creating a “state-of-the-art” career center that would serve as a national model of comprehensive, customer-driven services. The staff at FutureWorks are knowledgeable about contemporary workforce development issues and skilled in high-performance workplace practices. Although FutureWorks and its “sister” career centers replace the local public Employment Service field offices previously operated by the state Department of Employment and Training, the vision for FutureWorks is not that of a “placement agency,” it is of a broker of community workforce development services, labor market information, and career education in Hampden County. Staff attitudes reflect this orientation. They are committed to applying continuous improvement strategies and team skills in the design and operation of customer services. Because it has been fashioned “of a whole cloth,” rather than piecemeal, the Center has been immune to the culture clash commonly experienced by staff in One-Stop Centers formed through the consolidation of multiple public agencies and departments.

### **Relevance of the Local Design to the Four Federal Goals**

#### **Universal Access**

FutureWorks Career Center has operationalized the concept of universal access in a variety of ways. Among the most innovative is the implementation of a universal membership system. When individuals visit the Center, they are encouraged to become members. Membership is available to anyone who visits FutureWorks.

The rationale for marketing services as membership-based is at-least three-fold. First, membership conveys to the customer the idea that he or she is important and deserving of high-quality service. Second, membership-based services imply that membership is separate from employment. Since FutureWorks is committed to educating the community about how to prepare for the “new workforce” through lifelong learning, the center encourages members to draw upon FutureWorks resources for their lifelong employment and training needs, not simply for the next job. Third, membership is a tangible means of preserving universality of access when members have very different needs—all members receive the same membership card and enter

the system in the same way, even though they may receive services of differing intensity.<sup>6</sup>

Providing a well-staffed, well-equipped resource room is perceived as another means of ensuring universal access. The resource room at FutureWorks is attractive and provides access to a wide range of information both on-site and through Internet access. Moreover, staff members in the resource room speak several languages and are equipped to assist FutureWorks' diverse membership. Some equipment has been adapted to meet the needs of the hearing- or sight-impaired. FutureWorks perceives the staff members of the resource room to be among the most valuable human resource assets in the center because of the number of members with whom they interact everyday and the value of the services they provide.

FutureWorks has adopted extended hours in an effort to render services more accessible to customers. The Center is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, with extended hours on Tuesday evenings (until 8:00 p.m.) and Saturdays (9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.). FutureWorks will also remain open beyond its normal operating hours for special projects such as job fairs or pre-arranged tours of the facilities.

### **Customer Choice**

FutureWorks provides a wide range of services to job-seeker and employer members and ensures that these services are easily accessible. The Center sees itself as a major point of entry into the regional workforce development system, including the services provided on-site by FutureWorks staff as well as services provided by public and private providers throughout the region. FutureWorks offers high quality information about careers, jobs, training programs, and tuition assistance, and can provide counseling, assessment, and limited course instruction through the workshops available at the Center. Staff stated, "If we do not have the information, we will find it, and we'll assist our members in navigating their way through it." It should be noted that FutureWorks, in part because it has not taken over the functions of all public workforce development agencies, sees itself as a broker rather than as a provider of all

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<sup>6</sup> One FutureWorks "member," a welfare recipient, expressed enthusiasm for her card because it served as a tangible evidence that the system had invested in her: FutureWorks trusted her to "carry that card and run it through these machines just like all of the other people."

services to all people.<sup>7</sup> Rather, its expertise lies in empowering job-seekers and assisting employers in meeting their workforce development needs. With few exceptions, the choice of service type and intensity is made by individual Center customers, rather than as a result of program-based requirements.<sup>8</sup> FutureWorks seeks to provide its members with a wide array of services, access to services not available on-site, and information that will assist them in good career-decision-making.

### **Integrated Services**

FutureWorks has identified service integration as its most challenging objective. Although the internal organization of services provided by ETI at the FutureWorks Career Center follows a fully-integrated design, not all public workforce development funds were reallocated nor all categorical program responsibilities reassigned to the One-Stop career centers. The most notable program/funding streams not yet consolidated into One-Stop career center operations at the state level are JTPA Title II funds for services to economically disadvantaged individuals and Title III funds for dislocated worker services. Both FutureWorks and the Hampden County Regional Employment Board anticipate that JTPA funds will eventually comprise a portion of the funds that support the statewide career center initiative. If and when JTPA funds are reallocated to state career center operators, the range of customer services available within career centers is likely to be further enhanced and Center staff will alter internal objectives, operations, and performance measures accordingly.

FutureWorks has developed two strategies to support integration of services under these circumstances. First, through staff training efforts, ETI ensures that

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of the site visit, although FutureWorks had replaced the local Employment Service field office operated by the state Department of Employment and Training, a number of other employment-related agencies continued to function within the same service area. These included a JTPA Title III-funded dislocated worker center, the local JTPA Title II administrative entity, and the local office of the state agency responsible for vocational rehabilitation. As an information and services broker, FutureWorks maintains regular contact with the agencies as well as a wide range of local education and training service providers.

<sup>8</sup> Over time, FutureWorks has been forced to introduce distinct procedures to meet the service or reporting requirements of some categorical funding streams. For example, to meet its responsibility to provide reemployment services to UI profilees, FutureWorks schedules reemployment workshops for and monitors attendance by members belonging to this target group. To accommodate requirements for veterans' preference, an outstationed DET staff member at FutureWorks has a counseling caseload consisting exclusively of veterans. The Center, however, goes to great lengths to make these distinctions invisible to Center customers.

Career Specialists at the FutureWorks Center are aware of all training and workforce development services available to Center members. FutureWorks requires that all staff “become very familiar” with the requirements of the following programs or funding sources: JTPA Titles II and III; Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA/TRA); Full Employment Program (welfare-to-work program); Job Corps; state and federal student financial aid grants and loans; the federal Enterprise Zone program, veterans’ employment services; and vocational rehabilitation services.

Second, FutureWorks will assess the availability of funds in such programs, assist customers through the application and approval process, and conduct member follow-ups to ensure customer satisfaction with program services. One FutureWorks staff member is the designated “specialist” on these programs and assists FutureWorks members in applying for program services.

### **Performance-Driven/Outcome-Based**

The state’s emphasis on local autonomy in the design and operation of career center services and the wide variation in the capacities of center operators has made the development of performance measures at the state level a formidable challenge. The state has identified four general areas against which the career centers will be held accountable. These include: customer satisfaction; customer outcomes; market growth and penetration; and gross product. Although the state has developed performance measures in each of these areas, considerable responsibility in implementing such measures has been given to the Regional Employment Boards. The REBs are responsible for implementing the measures to assess the performance of individual career centers. There is considerable interest at the regional and local levels in establishing high-quality performance measures, but also widespread uncertainty about the nature of such measures and their use.

To respond to the state’s “competitive model,” FutureWorks’ management is attempting to establish performance criteria that accomplish three sets of objectives: (1) providing information about whether the Center has accomplished state, regional, and local goals; (2) allowing for comparisons of performance across local sites; and (3) informing the continuous improvement process within FutureWorks. To support these objectives, ETI has implemented a sophisticated management information system designed to track member outcomes.

*Accomplishing state, regional and local goals.* Because the career centers are replacing the local Division of Employment and Training (DET) field offices in their respective areas, the state of Massachusetts is under tremendous pressure—both inside and outside of state government—to demonstrate that its new approach to workforce development is a success. Under these circumstances, performance measures that compare outcomes of the old system to outcomes of the new system are crucial. At the same time, however, the new vision of workforce development has established different objectives than those associated with the old system. Negotiating measures that are both useful to practitioners of the new system and that allow for comparison to the performance of the old system poses a formidable challenge to the MassJobs Council, the REBs, and the centers themselves.

*Comparing performance across different local sites.* Another challenge posed by the “competitive model” of workforce development services in the state of Massachusetts arises from the emphasis on local autonomy. The Regional Employment Boards allowed considerable latitude in the development of plans for center operation. Presumably, centers will begin to develop “specialties” to enhance overall customer choice. However, if different centers specialize in different types of services or customers, this makes it difficult to compare the performance of “competing” centers.

*Informing Continuous Improvement.* FutureWorks, in addition to implementing a management information system designed to track customer outcomes, has developed and implemented a procedure to promote and monitor high-performance outcomes. The “No Excuses” Team is a cross-functional, rotating group of six FutureWorks staff charged with maintaining customer focus, designing mechanisms for customer feedback, and insuring that such feedback informs the continuous improvement process.

## **ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE**

*Local Governance Arrangements.* The structure of the One-Stop initiative in Hampden County has been heavily influenced by organizational changes initiated at the state-level. In 1988, the state of Massachusetts enacted legislation that created both the state-level MassJobs Council and the network of Regional Employment Boards (REBs) that currently governs and oversees the state’s One-Stop career centers. The state Career Center Office serves as the day-to-day liaison between the MassJobs Council, its partner state-level departments and agencies, and Regional Employment Boards on

policy, procedural, and fiscal issues related to the start-up and operation of One-Stop career centers.

Regional Employment Boards were given considerable autonomy in developing local plans that meet identified workforce development needs and in selecting career center operators. The Hampden County REB formed a One-Stop Implementation Task Force to develop concrete strategies and methods for implementing the career center system in Hampden County. The members of this committee developed the strategy for implementing the competitive bidding process and wrote the request for proposals (RFP) from prospective career center operators. In Hampden County, the Regional Employment Board sought “inventive partners” rather than vendors who would carry out specific pre-defined services.

Because Hampden County was one of the first regions in the state to engage in a competitive bidding process, many important decisions had not yet been made about various dimensions of the career center system at the time the RFP was issued—including the nature of the integrated funding stream that would be used to support career center operations and the extent to which center operators would be responsible for operations/reporting linked to categorical programs. To ensure that the selected career center operators would be able to function in this rapidly evolving arena, the Hampden REB emphasized the importance of flexibility and the ability to work with other agencies, service providers, and community-based organizations in its request-for-proposal process.<sup>9</sup>

Locally, the selected career centers are responsible to the REBs for meeting the terms of their charters. The charters to operate career centers are revocable if center operators fail to meet identified performance benchmarks. Center managers and staff work closely with the REBs on policy and procedural issues, local economic development initiatives, and efforts to identify emerging community needs and strategies to address these needs. Center managers also maintain frequent contact with the state Career Center Office staff for technical support and assistance with reporting and compliance issues.

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<sup>9</sup> Despite the emphasis on the need for flexibility, FutureWorks management have been dismayed by the need to adapt to circumstances that differ dramatically from the integrated funding stream and services described in the RFP. Among these differences are the need to operate TAA/TRA, and reemployment services for UI profilees according to the rules and reporting requirements of these categorical programs.

FutureWorks Career Center is managed by an Executive Director whose previous assignment for ETI was to design and operate a dislocated worker center in Connecticut based on the principles of customer-driven outcome-based services. The management team for the FutureWorks Center includes managers of the Center's four functional divisions (MIS/Administration, Career Development Services, Employer Services, and Community Relations/Marketing). Because all staff at the Center work for the same entity, establishing cross-agency staffing along functional lines has not been an issue.

*Participating Local Agencies.* The career center approach envisioned by the state and local workforce development policymakers would have "leapfrogged" the difficult process of building local partnerships among different workforce development entities by establishing a single career center operator responsible for offering all services under an integrated funding stream. In the long-term, the Hampden County REB and FutureWorks anticipate increased consolidation of workforce development services and the replacement of multiple categorical programs by a cohesive system with an integrated funding stream. At present, however, FutureWorks is functioning as a broker of services in an environment in which a number of different agencies, service providers, and categorical programs are still operating. In this context, the FutureWorks Career Center is becoming an increasingly important community resource in the areas of labor exchange and economic development.

To be an effective broker of community services, FutureWorks has invested heavily in outreach to (1) local institutional partners, (2) community-based organizations, and (3) area education and training providers. The relationship between FutureWorks and each of these types of organizations is addressed briefly below. FutureWorks anticipates that the network of these providers of training and other services will become increasingly organized and better able to support complementary community initiatives, such as welfare reform and school-to-work.

*Institutional Partners* are the other state agencies with which FutureWorks maintains cross-referral relationships and/or frequent institutional contact. Institutional partners include:

- The Hampden County Workers Assistance Center, which provides services to dislocated workers under JTPA Title III funds; and the Massachusetts Industrial Services Program, which is the state-level

agency that has been responsible for administering Title III services to dislocated workers and rapid response services to employers.

- The Hampden County Employment and Training Consortium, which administers services to economically disadvantaged workers under JTPA Title II.
- The Urban League and the Massachusetts Career Development Institute, which are contracted service providers under JTPA Title II.
- The regional office of the state Department of Employment and Training (DET), which is responsible for administering ES, UI, TAA/TRA, and reemployment services to UI profiles through field offices in areas that have not yet implemented One-Stop career centers.
- The local offices of the state Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), which is responsible for providing time-limited cash assistance and employment-related services to individuals under welfare reform legislation.
- The regional office of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, which administers vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with serious disabilities.
- The Massachusetts Commission for Blind, which administers rehabilitation services to individuals with visual impairments.

FutureWorks also maintains regular contact with a wide array of additional economic development entities, service providers, and educational programs and institutions. At the time of the site visit in September 1996, 48 such organizations had visited FutureWorks since its opening in June.

*Community-based Organizations* with which FutureWorks maintains regular contact include a wide range of social service and non-profit organizations, as well as libraries, civic associations, and religious or cultural institutions. At the time of the site visit, FutureWorks had contacted 81 such organizations in writing and by telephone in order to invite them to visit the Center and learn about the services provided there.

*Potential Education and Training Provider Partners* include training institutions with which FutureWorks (and the Department of Employment and Training field offices before the career centers opened) has not yet developed a formal cross-referral relationship. In an effort to expand the range of training providers with which the Center maintains ongoing relationships, FutureWorks has contacted 36 training institutions, colleges, universities, and academies in western Massachusetts to learn

more about their programs and invite them to learn about the services available at FutureWorks.

## **COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

The environment at the FutureWorks Career Center supports a high level of both formal and informal communication. Formal channels of communication have been institutionalized in FutureWorks through the organization and management of staff. The managers of each functional area support innovation and creativity on the part of their staff by regularly soliciting their concerns, ideas and questions, and bringing them to the attention of other managers in an effort to ensure complementarity between the objective and strategies of these functional areas. Staff at FutureWorks are divided into four primary functional divisions, including (1) Career Development Services, (2) Employer Services, (3) MIS/Administrative Services, and (4) Community Relations and Marketing Services.

Teamwork and communication skills are evident among staff of all divisions at all levels. Staff of each division meet with the division manager weekly. Staff members are also encouraged to approach managers with questions or concerns as they arise. Managers, in turn, also meet with each other and with the Executive Director on a weekly basis, and are encouraged to bring other issues to the group's attention as they arise. Whole-staff meetings and brainstorming sessions also occur on a regular basis. All staff have can also send and receive both internal and external electronic mail.

Cross-functional teams are used to address specific activities. For example, Employer Services staff coordinate with Administrative Services staff to plan job fairs or other on-site services for employers. Career Development Services staff coordinate with Community Relations and resource room staff to identify providers of training for specific career areas. Teams are also formed to develop ideas for new services or new means of service delivery, or to address specific challenges. Once a cross-functional team's objectives are met, the team is disbanded.

Many communication mechanisms have also been established to promote customer feedback, which is then used to inform the continuous improvement process. FutureWorks' management sees its own staff as its customers, and uses similar feedback processes to ensure their satisfaction. Visible suggestion boxes are strategically located throughout the Center to encourage customer input into the strategic planning process, and to alert FutureWorks staff of problems or issues that

require attention. Staff who prefer anonymity are encouraged to contribute their ideas in this manner. FutureWorks also plans to develop customer satisfaction surveys to solicit comprehensive, formal input from its employee customers.

FutureWorks staff reported that current communication protocols and day-to-day procedures relative to state-level agencies and the Career Center Office were generally effective, and had improved over time. One area of concern early on was that Career Center Office staff negotiated agreements with different state agencies on behalf of REBs and the career centers that these regional entities had not been party to but were expected to abide by.<sup>10</sup>

FutureWorks, its “sister” career center—Career Point, and the Hampden County REB have also developed frequent and substantive communication and high-quality working relationships. As a result of the communication among these entities, the roles of the various organizations are clear and all three exhibit varying levels of interdependence. Despite the element of competition built into the relationship between the two regional career center operators, these two entities have developed complementary functions, and have even developed a coordinated programmatic response to serving individuals affected by welfare reform.

#### **FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS, BUDGETING AND FISCAL ISSUES**

The MassJobs Council’s Career Center Office is the entity that currently provides Regional Employment Boards and One-Stop career centers with operating funds, based on a combination of federal One-Stop implementation grant funds and funds allocated by state agencies through Interdepartmental Service Agreements (ISAs). The state’s goal is to transition the emerging career centers as soon as possible from implementation grant support to ongoing federal workforce development funds supplemented by revenues generated at the local level through fees charged to career center customers for enhanced services.

During the initial stage of career center planning, four REBs were selected, through a competitive process, to receive federal One-Stop implementation grant funds

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<sup>10</sup> One example was an agreement made by the Career Center Office that One-Stop career centers would provide reemployment services to UI profilees under the Worker Profiling Reemployment Services program. Prior to being provided by the Career Center Office with instructions for conducting UI profiling, REBs and career centers had not been aware that they would be responsible for providing this service.

to support their initial system building efforts. The state had originally anticipated that federal workforce development block grants would provide an integrated funding stream to support the operation of the One-Stop career centers. When federal legislation was not enacted, the state Career Center Office took on the challenge of developing Interdepartmental Service Agreements (ISAs) with partner state agencies to support the statewide One Stop initiative in Massachusetts.

The partner agencies with which ISAs have been negotiated include: the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Department of Education, Massachusetts Industrial Services Program, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Council, and the Commission for the Blind. With the exception of support from the JTPA Title II and Title III programs—which flow through designated local grantees—all funds supporting the career center initiative are negotiated at the state level and flow through the state Career Center Office. The Career Center Office then reimburses both the Regional Employment Boards and the career centers for service provided.

According to the state's planned expenditures for FY 97, the FutureWorks Career Center was expected to be reimbursed for \$1.8 million in operating expenses, of which 46% were to be provided by an Interagency Services Agreement with the Department of Employment and Training, whose local field offices were replaced by the two Hampden County career centers. The details of career center financing are largely transparent to the individual career center operators. However, along with the transfer of funds from some agencies have come responsibilities for program-based reporting. REBs and career centers had not anticipated that they would still be subject to state-level reporting requirements for individual funding streams. Staff expressed frustration over this issue, indicating that their time would be much better spent assisting customers than reporting information about them.

Another challenge in the implementation of integrated funded has been the exclusion of JTPA funds and services from career center operations. Although the state Career Center Office had anticipated that JTPA funds would flow through the centers, the state did not mandate the participation of the JTPA entities in the state of Massachusetts' career center initiative. During the first year of career center operations, JTPA funds were not available for the support of career center operations because two-year JTPA service providers contracts were already in effect. However,

JTPA service delivery areas have not rushed to put themselves out of business by committing JTPA funds to the One-Stop career centers.

In Hampden County, FutureWorks maintains a mutual referral relationship with the local JTPA entity, which will continue to receive JTPA funds for at least the next fiscal year. Planning for the reallocation of JTPA funding to support the career centers has met with tremendous resistance. Whether JTPA funds will flow through FutureWorks, or the other career centers after the next fiscal year is uncertain.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

### **Physical Facilities**

The FutureWorks Career Center is located in downtown Springfield, directly across the street from Springfield Technical and Community College. Although the complex in which FutureWorks is housed is the old Springfield Armory, most residents know the area as the former location of Digital Equipment Corporation, formerly a large employer in the area. Staff and customers remarked that the location “could not be better.” The Center is accessible via almost any bus route is and within walking distance of schools and a number of social service providers. There is ample parking on the grounds.

The office space is considerable. With over 18,000 square feet of office space, the facility occupied by FutureWorks is currently the largest career center in Massachusetts. The facility is also ideal for the needs of FutureWorks staff. There is sufficient privacy to ensure comfort for customers receiving one-on-one Center services such as counseling, yet the high-energy and activity level in the Center ensures that a staff person is always visible and willing to answer customer inquiries. A large conference space also enables staff to hold job fairs on-site and host large orientation sessions. Although customers must take the elevator to the third floor of the building, the signage, both inside and outside of the building, is adequate to ensure that customers can find the Center.

As soon as customers step off of the elevator, they are greeted by the reception-area staff and asked if they have visited the center before. Center members for whom this is a return visit generally have pre-scheduled appointments and know where to go. As they enter the facility, members “swipe” their membership cards through a reader and punch in a code to indicate the nature of their visit that day. New visitors are invited to take part in an orientation to the Center. Two orientation sessions are held

every day—at 10:00 a.m. and at 2:00 p.m. Additional orientations are scheduled for Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings to meet the needs of students or individuals who are employed, but may be seeking new opportunities.

Orientation sessions include a tour of the facilities and a brief introduction to the services provided at the center. Orientations are held in one of two large classrooms; seats are arranged in a circle. The orientation leader introduces himself or herself and then asks participants to introduce themselves. The leader takes notes on participants who might be eligible for categorically-funded programs and forwards this information to the staff assigned to collect the Center membership applications at the conclusion of the session. Customers are then invited to walk around, use the resource room, or ask any questions they might have.

Staff cubicles are arranged to represent a compromise between the need for privacy and the desire for an open environment. All staff are visible, but the short three-walled cubicles provide some protection from the commotion created as members walk by the cubicles on their way to seminars, computer courses, or other appointments. The resource room is large and includes access to the following: 14 small cubicles that serve as individual telephone stations; 7 larger cubicles that contain computer workstations for resume and cover-letter preparation; 12 computer terminals with access to the Internet; two TV/VCRs; and a library that contains tables and chairs, and shelves stocked with numerous books, pamphlets, and brochures related to workforce development. The walls contain job postings by area of interest that are color-coded to indicate the month the job was posted. The center also contains 12 other computer terminals in a classroom used for instruction in basic computer skills. All computers are equipped with *Windows 95*, and a wide array of common office software packages.

A large room is available for job fairs or receptions; FutureWorks has used it frequently since the Center opened. Several smaller rooms serve as on-site interview or assessment rooms for employers. Although neat, clean, and well-organized, the facilities are not “sterile.” The high ceilings and conspicuous red pipes and vents render the atmosphere less formal than traditional office space, and more comfortable for a greater variety of customers.

The Executive Director’s office is the most visible office in the entire Center. Directly across from the reception area, the Director maintains a visible presence in the

Center. Of the customers interviewed at the Center, more than half indicated that they had met her or seen her walking around the center. When not engaged in meetings, the Director keeps her door open and encourages Center members to use the suggestion box attached to her office. “These are your tax dollars at work,” she notes repeatedly, “we need you to tell us how best to use them.”

### **Staffing Arrangements**

The 27 staff employed by ETI to staff the FutureWorks Career Center are assigned to four functional divisions, as follows:

- Eight *Career Development Services* staff are responsible for assisting individual customers with core and enhanced services. As described later in this profile, core services include services available to members of the general public free of charge; enhanced services include services available to customers eligible for specific categorical programs or services for which a user fee is charged. Career development services staff generally have graduate degrees in counseling. They coordinate closely with Employer Services staff.
- Eight *Employer Services* staff are responsible for assisting employer customers with core and enhanced services. These staff, many of whom were selected for their experience in the private sector or working with employers, coordinate closely with Community Relations and Marketing staff.
- Nine *MIS/Administrative Services* staff are responsible for maintaining and managing the MIS systems, the physical facilities, and the resource room. Administrative services staff also provide word processing services to FutureWorks staff and customers.
- Two *Community Relations and Marketing Services* staff are responsible for outreach, recruitment, public relations and the creation and maintenance of “interagency linkages,” which include partnerships between FutureWorks and other local service providers, training institutions, and economic development entities.

FutureWorks is managed by an Executive Director and a team comprised of the managers of the four functional divisions. If and when JTPA funds are added to the “integrated funding stream” supporting Center operations, additional divisions may need to be added to support expanded FutureWorks services. At the time of the evaluation site visit, all staff working in the FutureWorks Career Center were employees of ETI, with the exception of an outstationed Veterans’ Employment Services Representative—who was employed by the Department of Employment and Training. Many of these staff were hired by ETI for FutureWorks Career Center

because of their considerable experience in ES/UI or JTPA programs. However, since FutureWorks does not have co-located representatives from other agencies or programs, the organization of cross-agency staff along functional lines has not been an issue.<sup>11</sup>

### **Capacity Building**

Capacity building efforts with regard to local implementation of the career center initiative in Massachusetts have been undertaken by the regional level (the REBs) as well as at the level of career center staff.

*Regional Employment Boards.* As the career center initiative has evolved, the roles played by Regional Employment Boards have changed dramatically. Regional Employment Boards are granted considerable autonomy in designing and overseeing the career centers within their jurisdictions. To ensure a basic level of consistency across regions, however, the state Career Center Office has assisted the REBs in the planning and start-up of the career center system. For example, Career Center Office staff have provided training and technical assistance on specific procedures and topics common to all centers, such as management information systems and reporting issues. In addition, the Career Center Office has sponsored full-day, comprehensive technical assistance workshops for REBs involved in One-Stop planning or implementation during both the first and second years of the One-Stop implementation grant.

*FutureWorks Career Center.* In local One-Stop sites that represent coalitions of different partner agencies, team-building and training to meld diverse work “cultures” have emerged as important issues. At FutureWorks, however, staff are already part of the same organization and team-work is already an essential component of the corporate culture. There is little sense of hierarchy at FutureWorks. Rather, as noted by one FutureWorks career specialist, staff share a clear commitment to “doing whatever needs to be done to accomplish the Center’s mission —whether it’s part of [an individual staff member’s] job description or not.”

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<sup>11</sup>Since the site visit, plans have been made to co-locate staff from other agencies at the FutureWorks Center. Staff from the JTPA Title III substate entity are expected to be co-located at the Center starting in March 1997. It is possible that staff working for the JTPA Title II administrative entity will also be co-located at the Center in the future. This will dramatically change the integrated staffing design originally envisioned by the REB and planned by ETI as the chartered Center operator.

The staff of FutureWorks is also well-versed in the new paradigm of the high-performance workplace. FutureWorks managers and staff have implemented numerous high-performance practices in their own operations and are well-equipped to provide customers with high quality information about careers and labor markets and assist them in making important career decisions. Participation on the “No Excuses” Team (a cross-functional, rotating group of six FutureWorks staff charged with maintaining customer focus, designing mechanisms for customer feedback, and insuring that such feedback informs the continuous improvement process) provides staff with the opportunity to practice their high-performance work skills to improve customer services.

One capacity-building challenge with which FutureWorks staff have had to contend during the initial start-up phase has been deciding what training is needed immediately and what training is important over the long term. Staff training on all the FutureWorks technology systems received early emphasis. There are several reasons for this emphasis. First, FutureWorks’ customer service orientation requires that staff be able to use the newest technology in serving customers. Staff indicated that employer customers think that FutureWorks “means business” because staff can utilize the newest technology. For individual customers, staff familiarity with technology means that customers can get assistance in typing a cover letter on Word for Windows ‘95 or looking for jobs on the Internet. Second, staff familiarity with technology is part of a FutureWorks strategy to build a flexible staff. If all staff are trained in the use of the Center’s basic systems, then staff can easily float to stations other than their regular assigned job to accommodate fluctuations in customer flow. Finally, when staff members know how to use the Center’s technology, they can apply the technology-based tools to improve Center services, policies, procedures or protocols, or develop new services.

Training on additional topics (e.g., diversity, local labor markets, customer service) is also seen as important by *FutureWorks* managers and staff. However, managers indicated that prioritizing and finding time for such training was sometimes a challenge, given the high volume of customers requesting service from the Center on an ongoing basis. At the time of the site visit, all FutureWorks staff had completed both diversity and customer-service/empowerment training. Moreover, all staff had participated in each of the workshops available to FutureWorks customers, including

the orientation and career seminars, to enhance their ability to provide good information about these programs to their members.

Using a “train the trainer” model, FutureWorks staff members who are familiar with particular categorical programs are training all staff in program eligibility requirements, and procedures. All FutureWorks staff are responsible for familiarizing themselves with federal and state categorical programs, but staff members with high levels of expertise serve as “specialists” and train other staff in the details of these programs.

### **Management Information Systems (MIS)**

The major components of the FutureWorks information systems infrastructure include (1) a customer information and tracking system; (2) an employer tracking system; (3) a system for collecting data on center usage; (4) job search systems; and (5) a system for tracking customer satisfaction. Although the state Career Center Office has been working on developing a system to extract career center data for use in a statewide summary reporting system, the current MIS systems in use at the FutureWorks Center have been initiated at the local level. The systems used primarily by Center managers are described briefly below. The job search systems and other customer-oriented services are described in the following section.

- FutureWorks maintains an in-house comprehensive customer information system supported by *Client IMS*, a DOS-driven database that manages information about individual members and determines program eligibility. The program also has interface capability with the data management systems operated by the state of Massachusetts.
- Another database holds information about employer members. This system, *Account Manager*, tracks information about employers’ use of center services and any financial transactions that occur between FutureWorks and employer members.
- The *bar code/swipe system* of individual membership cards tracks overall aggregate center usage and, through software developed internally, feeds this aggregate information into the individual case files of center members. This way, when members use the resource room or visit the center for self-driven services, their activity is reflected in their individual case files. Moreover, since the system uses codes to determine the use of individual services, FutureWorks can track the demand for its various services it offers, as well as the overall traffic in the Center.

Staff at FutureWorks identified several challenges with regard to the development and maintenance of effective and efficient information systems. First, since customer service is the priority of all center staff, FutureWorks is attempting to minimize time spent on data collection and reporting. The model FutureWorks has in mind is a system that would have access to all relevant data with “just-in-time” data manipulation and analysis. The idea is that all data on customers, services, and outcomes would be collected in a central location (file server) with tailored reports generated as needed to meet the needs of different staff members or funding sources. However, since data are currently collected through a variety of different systems that are not necessarily compatible with one another, staff face a challenge in establishing an interface that will permit data transfer across systems.

Second, the data collected must meet the needs of a wide range of users. The MassJobs Council, the REB, and different staff members within FutureWorks all have different data needs. At the same time, FutureWorks is resistant to collecting data that are not absolutely necessary. Determining the universe of data that is required to meet the needs of multiple users while avoiding extraneous data collection is a difficult balance for FutureWorks staff to negotiate.

Finally, the MIS staff members, although extremely technically competent and excited about learning and implementing new automated systems and procedures, are wary of “technology overkill.” As the manager of Information Systems noted, “technology is not the answer to every problem—some objectives are better accomplished using manual procedures. . . it’s our job to establish a balance between the two.”

FutureWorks looks to the state—the MassJobs Council and the Career Center Office—for assistance in establishing an efficient system to fulfill reporting requirements. Although the state is working with a high-technology consulting firm to develop a data extraction system that will collect data from the Career Centers with minimal burden on center staff, this system was not yet operational at the time of our visit. In this interim period, center staff have been working with the Career Center Office to identify reporting requirements and develop strategies to fulfill such requirements.

### **Labor Market Information and Related Information Technology Improvements**

As part of an emerging statewide network of career centers, FutureWorks has access to customer-oriented LMI products developed at the state level and to labor market information developed by state-level agencies, as well as to products it has developed internally. Thus, in developing its menu of labor marketing information products to offer its customers, FutureWorks is able to build upon a strong foundation developed by the MassJobs Council, the Career Center Office, and state-level agencies.

The MassJobs Council Career Center Office has created a World Wide Web page available to anyone with Internet access. This web page contains links to other government agencies, including the state Division of Employment and Training, as well as to other publicly-funded employment resources such as America's Job Bank and the home pages of FutureWorks and other One-Stop career centers. The MassJobs Council's web page is a marketing and information tool that describes the state's new employment and training system and instructs users how to access the system either in-person or from their home computers. The texts of the MassJobs Council's Annual Reports from 1994 to the present can also be accessed through the MassJobs Council home page. Much of this text is devoted to explaining the "new paradigm" of workforce development services.

Through the MassJobs Council's web page, Center customers may also gain access to:

- On-line employment databases maintained by each individual career center as well as a statewide and national database available through *America's Job Bank*.
- *WinSearch*, a database comprised of current job announcements, which allows users to search job announcements contained in the system using key words.

Automated labor-exchange tools developed or purchased by FutureWorks supplement the information systems available on the MassJobs Council's Internet web page and support the Center's labor exchange function. *Resume Express* is a program currently under development that will allow FutureWorks to send disks or transfer electronic files to employers who will then be able to scan/search them for appropriate candidates. Locally-initiated automated products also include an on-line listing of posted jobs maintained by FutureWorks, which is linked to the FutureWorks Web Page and can be accessed through the computers available in the resource room. The same job listing are posted on the bulletin boards in the Center. The boards are industry- or

field-specific and the job-listings are posted on color-coded cards indicating the month in which the job order was placed. FutureWorks staff have also compiled several three-ring binders containing the World Wide Web sites of various employment bulletin boards. Members are encouraged to search through the binders and then tap into these home pages through the Internet. Assistance is available to members who are interested in posting resumes on-line or sending them directly to employers over the Internet.

In the FutureWorks Career Center, national, state, and local labor market information can also be accessed through more traditional paper sources available in the Center's resource room. There, job-seekers and employers will find the career resources library. The library holds a wide array of reference materials, including tools for career exploration, instructional material, guides to educational opportunities, and information about other public agencies and programs. A separate video library contains both informational and instructional videos for member use. A communication board contains recent articles on employment/training strategies of local labor markets, as well as information about local job fairs, seminars or community events of interest to job seekers and employers.

Several CD-based products also offer relevant labor market information. *Career Search* contains information about local businesses by name or by industry. *Job Analyzer* provides information about specific careers, including skill requirements, wage information, and projected growth. *CompuSelect* contains information and articles about job opportunities and firms in the computer technology industry. *Executive Advisor* is a self-driven career assessment package.

FutureWorks customers with whom we met during the evaluation site visit expressed great enthusiasm for many of these products, particularly the Internet access and various guides identifying job opportunities "on the Net." The Center plans to maintain its large paper bulletin boards containing job listings identical to those available in electronic format. This enhances customer choice and provides first-time visitors with information about the job opportunities available without overwhelming them by introducing them to so many resources all at once. Resource room staff indicated that the bulletin boards also double as a marketing tool for the high-tech job search tools available through the Center: as Center members arrive for a tour or for specific services, they often peruse the boards on their way in or out, and return later

to learn more about a specific job—at that time, staff will introduce them to the electronic labor market information and job search tools.

### **Marketing**

The FutureWorks staff has engaged in substantial community outreach to service providers, training institutions and community-based organizations. Staff members have also been very active in community economic development initiatives. However, because of all of the publicity generated by the controversy over the state’s “competitive model,” FutureWorks has not had to conduct extensive marketing—it has drawn large numbers of visitors as a result of state or local media coverage or simply by word of mouth.

FutureWorks is, however, in the process of developing marketing strategies to reach populations not traditionally served by the public employment and training system, such as students in grades K-12 (through the state’s school-to-work initiative). For marketing materials, FutureWorks has used the state’s One-Stop brochures and press releases. In addition, staff have developed FutureWork’s own marketing tools for local use, including a listing of employer services targeted to local employers and monthly calendars describing Center activities.

## **DELIVERY OF ONE-STOP SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS**

### **Services for Individual Customers**

Core services currently available to all customers of FutureWorks Career Center include the following:

- *An orientation to the Center.* Two orientation sessions are held every day—at 10:00 a.m. and at 2:00 p.m. Additional orientations are scheduled for Tuesday evenings and Saturday mornings to meet the needs of students or individuals who are employed.
- *Job listings and job matching services* may be accessed from computers in the Center’s resource room or from any computer with the ability to connect to the Internet. All career centers in the state of Massachusetts share job listings with the state Career Center Office. Customers can access these listings over the Internet through the state’s Web site or the Web pages of the local sites. Paper bulletin boards at FutureWorks also display local job listings. Members may also access *America’s Job Bank* and numerous on-line labor exchange database through the Internet.

- *Access to Resume Express* (ETI's "talent bank") and scanning service are also available without charge to all Center customers.
- *Self-service and assisted access to labor market information* are available on-site in the form of written and automated information in the resource room and through remote access to the state's Web site.
- *Self-service career planning activities* within the resource room include a variety of CD-based programs for career exploration or assessment, software to practice and self-certify skills in typing and 10-key data entry, career planning videos, and information about providers of specific training programs and other supportive services.
- *Self-service job search training activities* within the resource room include videos, paper and electronic job search materials, and resume preparation assistance (both computer-based and assisted by resource room staff).
- *Referrals to available community services*, including training resources, and supportive services are provided by reception staff, career specialists, and through written materials in the resource room.
- *Assessment*. All customers are encouraged to develop an individual customer action plan with the assistance of an assigned career specialist. The plan is informed by a basic assessment of individual needs and skills.
- *A 15-hour on-site computer basics class* is offered free-of-charge. The class lasts three hours per day for one week and teaches basic keyboard/mouse skills. It prepares members to use the self-driven services available in the resource room.
- A comprehensive *Career Transition Seminar* is available to all customers. This seminar is a two-day orientation to careers and job search techniques in the 90s. It includes seven instructional modules, requiring both team and individual activities. This seminar is taught by a local instructor who works for FutureWorks on a contract basis.
- *Other specialized seminars and strategy sessions* on a range of topics to support reemployment are available to all customers.
- Organized *job search teams* are also available to all customers. These teams may be targeted to individuals facing specific barriers. The Over-the-Hill club, for example, is a group of older job-seekers who meet to share leads and discuss job-search strategies.

Although the development of fee-based services is a clear goal for the Center, enhanced services to individual customers were not emphasized during the first year of operations. Enhanced or fee-based services include the following:

- The Center offers *specialized assessment*, such as the Myers-Briggs personality test or evaluation and certification for specific skill-sets to customers who want to pay for such services, agencies who refer their clients on a fee-for-service basis, or employers who want to purchase such services on behalf of job applicants or current employees.
- *Success skills training*, rooted in the SCANS skills, is oriented to customers who are changing careers entirely or are employed by firms that are implementing team-based management practices.
- On-site basic skills, ESL, and ABE/GED training are available as dictated by customer demand.
- More advanced computer literacy courses can build upon the basic skills instruction offered to all FutureWorks members.

FutureWorks has also developed a number of formal strategies for assisting members who are likely to require more intensive services, such as recipients of transitional assistance to needy families. At the time of the site visit, however, these services had not yet been developed. Staff also envision some changes in the services provided if JTPA funds are reallocated to the career centers during the next fiscal year.

One group which the Center has a special mandate to serve is UI profilees. After negotiating its charter with the Regional Employment Board, FutureWorks found out that it would be responsible for providing services under the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) program. The Center is currently wrestling with how to provide services to UI profilees. Although staff are committed to providing the types of services members require, they want to avoid the stigma of associating particular customers with categorical programs. Currently, UI profilees are contacted through the mail. They are requested to call the center and ask for a particular (fictitious) individual. The use of this fictitious name upon calling identifies the customers to reception staff as UI profilees. Thus, without any “labeling” of these customers as participants in a particular program, Center staff assist UI profilees in receiving appropriate services.

### **Services for Employer Customers**

FutureWorks has also developed a comprehensive menu of services for employer customers. Employer services fall into two different categories: core services, which

are available free of charge to all employers and enhanced services available on a fee-for-service basis. Services are as follows:

Core services include:

- Developing a customized employer services plan;
- Placing job orders;
- Screening and referral of candidates;
- Access to electronic databases of job-seekers; and
- Information on workforce development programs.

*Enhanced services* include:

- Specialized recruitment and screening;
- Testing, assessment, checking references of job applicants;
- Assistance with downsizing, including the provision of outplacement services to laid off workers;
- Success skills training for incumbent workers;
- Brokering of public financial incentives;
- Job task analysis;
- Seminars on workforce issues;
- Training in customized PC applications; and
- Consulting on human resources management issues.

FutureWorks experienced a high demand from employers both for core and enhanced services during its first year of operations. At the time of the evaluation site visit, the Center had held numerous job fairs and had performed specialized screening and testing of nearly 2,000 job seekers for local employers. FutureWorks expects the demand for these services to increase as more employers become aware of their availability.

## **CUSTOMER RESPONSE**

### **Individuals**

As a part of the local site evaluation process, conversations were held with a wide range of individual and employers customers using Center services. Among the individual customers we talked with (including dislocated workers from professional backgrounds, previous customers of the ES/UI system, and minority youth with no

formal training beyond high school) most expressed a high degree of enthusiasm about Center services. A number of customers expressed astonishment that so many of the services available at FutureWorks were available free of charge; several were delighted that their tax dollars were supporting services that they found useful. The younger customers also indicated that the services had been helpful and were particularly pleased with the information they had been able to access over the Internet.

Customers agreed that the greatest resource at the FutureWorks is the staff. Respondents expressed high praise for the counselors, the “teachers” (seminar leaders and the computer course instructor), and particularly, the resource room staff, who regularly help members navigate their way through resources available to them on a self-serve basis and assist them in receiving other services in which they might be interested. Despite the diverse clientele using the Center’s resources, no one expressed discomfort or intimidation with regard to the Center’s atmosphere or the diversity of Center customers.<sup>12</sup> One middle-aged dislocated white-collar professional noted that a service like FutureWorks should be available to everyone. He expressed delight that “such a nice place” was serving people “who really need the assistance” and also could accommodate individuals who preferred to search for work independently.

### **Employers**

During the local site visit, we also contacted several employers who had used FutureWorks services, ranging from small independent businesses to large international firms. Without exception, employers expressed great enthusiasm for FutureWorks, responding that the services they received were “outstanding” and “excellent.” Several respondents spoke first on behalf of the firms they represented, and then offered their personal opinions, as taxpayers, about the services and the staff at FutureWorks. One such respondent indicated that she was delighted that there was “finally one quality resource for both job-seekers and employers,” and that she felt that her tax dollars were “being put to good use in supporting the career center concept.”

Some of the specific comments made by employers reveal the capacity of FutureWorks to provide relevant high-quality services to employers. Employers stated:

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<sup>12</sup> Only one individual expressed frustration with his experiences. A long-time recipient of public assistance, he was dismayed that center staff encouraged him to attend the job search workshop before he received individualized assistance with specific job search activities.

- “FutureWorks understands that business needs support with human resource issues.”
- “They do not send us anyone who isn’t qualified.”
- “They are well-organized and they always return our calls.”

#### **ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED**

*Influences on Local Design.* Although the state of Massachusetts had already embarked upon the transformation of its public employment and training system before receiving the federal One-Stop implementation grant, the grant was viewed as an important asset by advocates of the reform effort. Particularly in light of the political controversy that arose around the career center initiative, respondents at many levels indicated that the initiative would have been interrupted statewide in the absence of federal funding support.

The “competitive model” of service delivery adopted by the state and embraced by the Hampden County Regional Employment Board was another important influence on the local design of services in Hampden County and at the FutureWorks Career Center. The competitive model espoused at the state and regional level established the parameters under which local centers were required to operate. As a result, the experiences of FutureWorks, and its sister center CareerPoint have the potential to inform the future development of the “competitive model” in the state of Massachusetts and beyond.

A third important influence was rooted in ETI’s experience in operating similar Centers. Although the FutureWorks management and staff had not managed a comprehensive service center prior to FutureWorks, they had managed numerous “One-Stop” centers serving dislocated workers. Staff realized the difficulty of establishing a universal One-Stop center in an environment that still required categorical program-based reporting and eligibility procedures and appeared prepared to meet this challenge.

Finally, public support has been a key influence in keeping the centers, including FutureWorks, operational during a period of intense political opposition. This support has resulted in a broad-based dialogue about community employment and training needs, which has, in turn, informed the continuous improvement process inside FutureWorks and its “sister” center, CareerPoint. It may ultimately be such support

that prompts the decision to integrate JTPA funds in the centers at some point in the future.

*Lessons Learned.* The services available at FutureWorks have been extremely well-received among job-seekers and employers in Hampden County. Among the strengths consistently noted are: expertise and enthusiasm on the part of Center staff; access to high-tech job search tools; and overall quality of services and facilities. Particularly notable achievements of the FutureWorks Career Center are the high level of integration of services and the orientation of services around meeting customer needs and achieving a high level of customer satisfaction. Staff were visibly motivated by their work, and extremely responsive to customer needs. When FutureWorks staff were asked about their own job satisfaction, without exception they responded enthusiastically. Staff repeatedly stated, “Our managers model the empathy, enthusiasm, and professionalism that they want to see throughout the center—it’s contagious.”

The challenges FutureWorks faces in its efforts to continue to provide high quality employment and training services to county residents, however, are formidable. At the state level, maintaining support in the legislature for the career center initiative stands out as a serious challenge. Several other Regional Employment Boards have already slowed their progress or taken steps backward because of the political pressure they face.<sup>13</sup> Staff at FutureWorks stressed state leadership and commitment to the competitive model as crucial in transforming workforce development services in Massachusetts and continuing to improve them over time. State-level planners have implemented the One-Stop initiative in a more piecemeal fashion than they had originally anticipated. As a result, the state has had to maintain separate employment and training systems—one for the regions that have adopted MassJobs Council’s One-Stop career center vision, and one for the regions that have not yet participated in the One-Stop initiative. The MassJobs Council and staff at the Career Center Office are concerned that the absence of statewide buy-in will compromise the success of the One-

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<sup>13</sup> Some local areas have retreated from the competitive approach altogether. In Berkshire County, for example, center operators were selected and notified of their selection when the local REB nullified the entire bidding process and retained the public agencies as service providers with no major change in workforce development services or their delivery. This action virtually removed the county from participation in the state’s One-Stop initiative.

Stop initiative in participating regions, and undermine the marketing of the career center model to new areas in the state.

Another difficulty that needs to be worked out among the MassJobs Council's Career Center Office, the Regional Employment Boards, and the One-Stop career center operators is the need to agree on the extent to which the career centers are responsible for program-based procedures and reporting. In negotiating Interdepartmental Services Agreements order to create an integrated funding stream for the One-Stop initiative, the Career Center Office promised that career centers would take on responsibilities they had never planned to shoulder.

Within FutureWorks, the coming year is expected to provide the serious challenge of serving large numbers of community residents who may not be job ready, as a result of welfare reform. Staff are currently developing a strategic plan and partnerships to address this need. Staff will also need to strategize about the means by which JTPA funds will be integrated into the Center's operations, if these funds become available, or about how to form a more effective partnership with the local JTPA entity in the absence of the transfer of such funds.