

## Operations Review Update (March 2010)

This report is an update of the 22 improvement activities as identified in the Operations Review. These activities were recognized in February, 2009 as beneficial to the workforce system and particularly within our operations.

### The following items have been completed:

**1) Identify, determine cost and purchase if appropriate, online training solutions. This will provide additional training options for jobseekers that may be more self-sufficient, yet still need some brush-up or specific skills training.**

*Targeting Success* software (20 licenses) has been purchased and delivered to area libraries. They are now installed in the libraries in New Bedford, Dartmouth, Fairhaven and Acushnet.

**2) Develop a quick list of web sites and other resources that can be given to all customers – to be used at any computer (in a library or at home).**

Web site summary list has been completed and posted in the Career Center Resource Room and paper copies are available to hand out to customers. Copies have also been posted on our web site and distributed to the local libraries.

**3) Explore the set up of temporary space adjacent to the career center, or in the Ferry Lot, or another suitable location in the city. A trailer could be used for workshops and other functions that do not require multiple staff.**

We completed the analysis of leasing trailers and locating next to the NB Career Center vs. rental space in town and the costs are very comparable. The Trailer option was originally preferred but the exceptionally large footprint and other considerations convinced us to lean toward space in downtown.

New Directions has leased space on Dover Street in downtown New Bedford and moved its youth department to that space. This allows additional classroom space at Dover Street and both some office and classroom space at the Quest Center. Career Center workshops will be scheduled at these classrooms beginning in November. Current space needs are being met by this expansion.

**4) Explore setting up satellite locations in the city, even if only on a temporary basis. The use of public computers in the library and other off-site locations is a valuable alternative to workshops and new *Key Train* modules, providing these remote locations allow for computer usage beyond 15-30 minutes .**

As stated in previous updates, the Targeting Success software was installed on public library computers in New Bedford, Fairhaven, Acushnet and Dartmouth. This allows customers of the library to do self-directed job readiness activities, write resumes, and practice interviewing skills. The library computers, and any other public access computers in the Greater New Bedford area can be used to access KEY TRAIN which allows job seekers to improve reading comprehension, applied math, problem solving and research skills. The Key Train remediation feature has been expanded to other users and customers who are participating in partner trainings. The Brownfield training includes remediation options for students who need to improve math scores to successfully complete college level chemistry classes; BCC 's Wise Women program incorporated computer lab time into the curriculum to allow the student to access Key Train for remedial work in applied math and reading comprehension; the Reentry Program now offers access to KEY Train behind the wall at the Bristol County House of Correction to aid the GED and ABE instructors in reaching more inmates interested in educational attainment while serving their sentence. The career counselors have implemented the skills improvement application of Key Train for those who need remediation to help support their entrance into skills training.

**5) Explore the purchase of a phone system service that allows for automated calls or messages to large groups of customers.**

Our current system allows for this on a limited basis. Other available systems can also be purchased for a fee of 12 cents per call, up to 5000 calls and 9 cents per call for between 5,000 and 10,000. We have determined that this function is not useful or practical for our needs. We have never had a need to have to call multiple customers in large numbers and don't see the benefit of embarking on a process that would require us to complete extensive manual data entry for a system we would likely never use. Should we determine a future need, we already have a system to support it.

**6) Explore the benefits in current time spent with job seekers and a possible reduction in the time that is spent with them – particularly with case managers, so that more onus is put on the job seeker to follow through with their individual plans for job readiness. This will enable case managers to see more job seekers.**

The career center has instituted a triage approach to assessing the appropriate level of service necessary to help move the job seeker to a job ready status. The process starts with all new customers attending a Career Center Seminar and completing a Job Search Inventory. A career assessment plan (CAP) is developed by the new State Re-employment Specialist (RES) staff. Those deemed job ready immediately begin work

with the Job Specialist. While those job seekers who are in need of slight remediation to move them to a job ready status are placed in Tier 1 case management conducted by new State RES staff with a time line of 90 days of service. Job seekers deemed deficient in marketable skills are referred to education / training and begin the intake/eligibility process.

Job Specialist have been able to devote less time spent at appointments as they are seeing more job ready customers. The State added 4 new with an additional specialist expected in May 2010 who provide both limited case management and job development services to a large number of UI claimants. This program launched in October 2009. The average case load of the RES specialist runs around 100 but could be as high as 120 customers. When a job seeker is determined to be in need of more Intensive Services, they enter into Tier 2 level of case management and are provided more hand holding and support. The 7 Case Managers/Career Counselors are serving approx 125 customers each on their case load.

This new process and resources has allowed more customers to have face time and guidance from staff because it meets the customer where they are and provides the appropriate level of assistance.

**7) Develop and schedule more group functions to free up key staff for other critical one-on-one functions.**

We have scheduled group intake sessions to help the process of determining WIA eligibility and will continue this process as needed. We are also holding increased numbers of Career Center Seminars (CCS) to handle the increased number of mandatory UI customers. We will continue to look for additional opportunities.

**9) Advocate for at least 2 additional Claims Takers from the State to work in New Bedford , as there may be an additional 20 state employees that will be released into the field to help with the current strains posed by an influx of UI claimants.**

Through early advocacy and discussions with the state, the GNB Region received the two additional state employees it needed to help handle the influx of UI claimants.

**15) Change the primary focus of Job Search / Job Development from the current process of “finding a job for a person” to “finding a person for a job”. Place more focus on the employer customer and less on the job seeker customer.**

We have been successful in our efforts to better utilize staff time to service Employer customers while also providing quality service to job seekers. Employer visits by Business Services staff concentrating on the targeted industries has increased as a result of the reorganization of the Business Services Team. Increased outreach efforts

have resulted in the creation of many new employer customers using our services. This was accomplished while also maintaining strong relationships with our base of existing employer customers. WE have developed working relationships with emerging companies such as LaFrance Hospitality and Market Basket resulting in future opportunities as these jobs materialize. Employers in many cases have often been hesitant to hire staff on a permanent basis because of the struggling economy. We have adjusted to this situation by working more closely with staffing agencies. This has resulted in both assisting area employers and our unemployed job seekers.

Still, this is a very labor intensive process to provide selected employers with a higher level of attention and pre-screening of job seekers to fill positions. Staff has to spend considerable time reviewing resumes & applications to determine quality of referral. Planned funding is no longer available to hire the additional Job Specialist & Follow Up staff to fill this need. To ensure our WIA training customers are finding jobs after training, a Job Specialist has been assigned to assist these Title I clients. This should result in an increased number of quality referrals to area employers. Business Services Job Specialists have been assigned to the targeted industries: Banking/Business Services, Health Care, Manufacturing and Construction, and the knowledge gained and communication enhancements with these groups will improve employer services. The establishment of a Business Resource Team with the WIB and the EDC is being discussed to improve the Employer and Career Center relationship.

**16) Move assessment closer toward the beginning of the customer experience. This may include moving the orientation/group seminars after an initial assessment is performed. It will be critical to identify job seeker marketable skills and job ready status up front. Conduct a triage basic quick assessment of all customers and id all of those job ready. Send them directly to Job Search. Those with marketable skills but not job ready refer to workshops. Offer skills training only to those without marketable skills - regardless if they want and meet eligibility requirements for training.**

We have implemented an initial assessment as part of the Career Center Seminar and then a more intense assessment after the customer has indicated a desire for training, and has been deemed eligible. The follow on assessment includes Key Train, the MASS CIS, and other assessment tools as needed. Using a newly developed Training Selection Board process, only customers without marketable skills and that are fully capable of successfully completing training will be considered for skills training. Others who need a quick enhancement are processed through eligibility and work with case managers to identify appropriate short term training. Others who are already job ready are directed to the Resource Room and / or a job developer and may attend some workshops as needed.

**18) Determine cost and develop more Spanish and Portuguese material both on line and in handouts. Plus use more bi-lingual volunteers. This will help accelerate both the intake and assessment processes, and improve the overall experience of non-English speaking job seekers.**

An analysis of the steps/processes/systems within the Career Center system has been completed. This has enabled us to determine the most appropriate intervention (paper or person) at each stage of the process. The center has multi-language materials prepared and available to jobseekers on the critical topics within our process: Unemployment Insurance, Career Center Seminar, and complaint process. Materials will be developed on an ongoing basis to respond to new needs as they arise. We have updated the list of in house interpreters that are available to respond to walk in customers, and continue to have a Spanish speaking staff person available one day a week who is able to assist CC staff with their scheduled appointments.

**Activities with reestablished target dates:**

**10) Enhance the registration process and forms to include more information that will allow better job matching (job history and skills), and identification of barriers earlier in the process. Both paper and online versions should be made available. To alleviate duplication of effort, explore the cost, implementation and maintenance of optical scan software and hardware and the development of a new database that will capture all the enhanced registration data, and allow for job matching. It must be understood that unless a waiver from the state would allow our proprietary data to supplement required MOSES data, program changes by DCS to the MOSES system would be required that allow our data to be imported automatically.**

**Target date: June 2010.**

An optical scan Pilot Project is underway using the youth summer jobs registration process as the test target. The software and vendor have been hired, equipment purchased, some test forms and an Access data base developed. Currently we are finalizing the implementation of the software with the vendor. The staff still needs to be trained, and additional forms developed. The entire Youth Application forms will be placed on the optical scan process once completed. Once completed, the entire registration data entry process will result in significant time saved, evident already by the success of the first test form. We anticipate final completion by June.

**19) Explore co-branding, co-marketing, and co-fundraising between the WIB and Career Center to support our need to plan together to create awareness for the programs and services that are available. This will also alleviate confusion that may exist in messaging to date; enhanced marketing plan that focuses on employers.**

**Target date: June 2010 to complete website redesign.**

The WIB has procured for services and made provisions within its budget to begin development on this during FY 2010.

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, the Business Development Committee voted the list of vendors (and bids) down to two potential candidates for the Branding & Website Project – Reynolds DeWalt and Medium Studios. The WIB's website is considered Phase I and the Career Center websites will be Phase II of the project. The WIB voted for the redesigned logo at its 3/17/10 meeting with provision to allow changes to the color. From there, the website and print will be addressed.

On Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, the WIB and GNB CC shared a booth at the Business Expo.

#### **Activities requiring ongoing integration:**

**8) Develop ability to identify skill needs of employers and start outlining needed training programs.**

Through the use of the Labor Needs Form (information from regional economic development entities), anticipated monthly business services team meetings (WIB and CC staff), communications with education and service provider partners, and interactions/networking with private, local business the WIB is refining its ability to identify skill/training needs of employers. An excellent example of this process is our recent and ongoing interactions with New Bedford Tactical Gear, LLC.

Within two weeks of being informed the New Bedford Economic Development Council (and state) of the new company's intended relocation to New Bedford, the WIB was able to ascertain the new employers' training needs (introduction to Lean), provide the training, and assist (through our Career Center) in the hiring process. We continue to work with New Bedford Tactical Gear and anticipate further technical assistance with HIT-G and a WTF application.

**11) Develop a more formalized relationship with schools to develop tailored curriculum and student support services. In addition, charge Youth Council with developing bridge supports that will register and track 100% of exiting seniors, if not going on to post-secondary education or the military. This will also require that confidentiality issues between the workforce system and the schools be resolved.**

The Career Dynamics course at New Bedford High School is required for graduation. The curriculum could include expanded workforce and job skills components. However, any curriculum modification must be approved by the Superintendent and, probably, vetted through the school committee.

Next steps will be explored that leverage the headway made by New Directions in its efforts to broaden interaction with the Dropout Coordinator and Guidance Counselors, that include younger students who have been identified as at-risk of dropping out. New Directions staff spent 6 months at the high school last year in the dropout prevention office and was part of the development of a referral process that now captures dropout information at the time of dropout. Then, an appointment is immediately set up by the school with the New Directions Youth Department to address and follow up on needs. Also, CS<sup>2</sup> has hosted continuing education training sessions at the Career Center for all guidance counselors to ensure they are familiar with the services available at the Career Center and the youth department. Additional efforts will also be made to identify resources that will provide intensive services to any youth dropping out.

**12) Expand business customer base by continuing efforts to synchronize business services between Career Center & WIB. We hope this will help establish stronger and more long-term business relationships.**

We continue to update information using the labor needs tool; particularly with public works projects. Over the past few months, we've also been working with the Housing Authority from both a candidate search and from a grant/partnering standpoint. Our next steps include reaching out to other economic development entities throughout the region to show the benefits of the labor needs tool, and to discuss how we might better be able to share job vacancy and labor needs.

**13) Identify and fund key professional development programs for staff that best compliment the high volumes of individuals and new demands for case management, training, assessment and support services.**

The Career Center has identified a couple of programs that provide Workforce Development certification for staff but the cost is about \$400 per person per class – well beyond our current or projected budget. We have also indicated to the State in the ARRA Business Plan that we desire State assistance with training for staff.

The Career Center continues to participate in its own Lean oriented Continuous Improvement Training through its WTF grant. They have completed Introduction to Lean, Value Stream Mapping, 5S, Problem Solving and Visual Systems modules. They have used the new tools to complete several projects and process improvements including: investigation and implementation of the KeyTrain system for assessment, Front Desk referral process and crowd control, new signage at the Career Center, development of a revised case conference (Training Selection Board) process and SOP for making better customer training decisions, organization of the supply closets, and reorganization of the Youth Lounge. Several groups will engage in Problem Solving related projects over the next three months (April/May/June 2010) under the oversight and guidance of the training vendor and this will exhaust the grant resources. Continued use of the skills learned through the grant is ensured as they have been ingrained in the staff and will be encouraged and supported by Leadership.

The WIB will revisit its efforts to train its own staff in continuous quality improvement. This was addressed last year, and put on hold due to economic conditions.

**20) Develop a comprehensive Youth Summer Jobs component that better integrates New Directions and other local summer youth efforts (such as Youth Build, the YMCA etc.), including the Mayor's Summer Jobs for Youth program.**

With the advent of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), and with it, the compressed timeline and additional youth that were required to be served, the integration of Youth Build and other organizations as well as many businesses has already begun to take shape this summer. However, during this same time, resources were allocated to ensure the short-term success of both the ARRA and WIA summer programs. More does need to be done to fully develop a "comprehensive" approach. Time will be dedicated to this effort following a debrief in October that assesses our efforts over this past summer.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)-led summer jobs program provided almost 800 teens and young adults with employment or program experiences that focused on "green," the environment, sustainability, and community services while requiring acquisition of job readiness skills, rather than all 10 WIA elements. The job readiness component was tracked with the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan. To meet the demands of the tight ARRA timeline, the WIB subcontracted with another vendor to conduct outreach efforts. Media releases, public information sessions, targeted presentations and radio interviews were conducted to build awareness and inform Greater New Bedford of some of the requirements, limitations, and opportunities associated with ARRA.

As a result of the single mandate for work readiness skills, and in response to requests for proposals seeking "green" opportunities and community service components, 12 new programs were brought on line during the summer. The programs were innovative,

flexible, and responsive, and most incorporated some interaction with other community organizations.

Consideration toward improved performance and integration of programs will include:

- Expanding emphasis on recruiting new vendors to serve WIA youth.
- Ensuring a representative cross section of city youth are offered opportunities; to ensure that youth in outlying communities are recruited; and ensuring the targeted older out-of-school youth population is approached.
- Streamlining the processing of a larger volume of applications and other documentation.
- Establishing central points of contact and oversight with larger programs, and recruiting individuals that can support programs outside of traditional schedules (such as school years).
- Educating public and employers on WIA and eligibility

**21) *Literacy Works* as a program should be more clearly incorporated into the present and future strategies of the region. Based on the critical need for ABE/ESOL services in the area, more can be done to include *Literacy Works* as a support for these programs.**

Literacy Works has been absorbed by the Business Development Committee and all goals and responsibilities are being overseen and implemented by the Director of Development. For example, Welcome Bags are back on track, two Early Literacy Consortium meetings have taken place, with a third scheduled for November 9<sup>th</sup> (with special guest Portia Bonner)

Additionally, the Pathways to Family Success Program is also back on track with the WIB taking a slightly lesser role in program coordination.

In regard to literacy, in general, the WIB is looking for ways to launch its ABE/ESOL Volunteer Pilot Program to address the ABE/ESOL waiting lists.

**22) Explore methods of regionalization to expand partnerships outside of the WIB's geography and leverage resources and skills found with such partners.**

We had begun drafting regional application with 4 other WIBs of Southeastern Mass for DOL Health Care grant, but it did not prove viable. However, the regional partnerships were established. The same group worked on the State Energy Sector Partnership grant from DOL. Additionally, CommCorp is considering holding a Southeastern Mass regional WIB meeting to further share information, strategies and best practices. The WIB also partnered with the Bristol WIB on the Reentry Grant and continues to look for ways to get involved regionally.

## **ON HOLD ITEMS:**

**14) Find space (more permanent). This includes solutions that co-locate staff from the WIB, the Career Center, Economic Development, and Education, in a mutually agreeable and larger space, to improve business services. In particular, individuals with the responsibility of business outreach which are constantly in the business community and are responsible for direct outreach to employers and other appropriate organizations.**

Career Center and WIB staff have been working with State DOT staff to identify the space needs to provide all Career Center and WIB services in a new facility associated with a new rail station and multipurpose building designed to be built in the area of the existing Career Center. Funding for the project is dependent on future Federal grants but initial grants currently received for repair of the rails and bridges are considered down payments on future funds to address the entire rail system including the new station for the Career Center.

It's also unknown if and when Bristol Community College will proceed with developing its larger downtown location.

**17) Review and revise ITA use policies: authorized amounts, short term versus long term training, focus on targeted industries, etc. This will change the dynamic of the Customer Choice policy.**

There's still a question as to whether \$30K for quick skills training should be allocated specifically for priority populations and industries, as determined by the WIB on Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>. This would require a policy change and vote at the December meeting. At the time, the funds are available for anyone needing quick skills training. There may also be discussion around whether these dollars are used for group training.