

Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board, Inc.
Business Development Committee
Meeting Minutes
04/14/09
GNB WIB Office - Conference Room 207

Committee members in attendance:

Christopher J. O'Neil, Chair
Paul Correia
Michael R. Shea
Jeffrey F. Travers
Lisa M. Lemieux
Michelle Hantman
Charles N. Sisson (by Rita Boudreau)
Roy Nascimento

Committee members absent:

James Butler (no contact)
Thomas G. Davis (no contact)
Dennis Galvam (no RSVP)
Andrew T. Guilbeault (e-mailed)
Derek Santos (no RSVP)
David Cabral (e-mailed)

Workforce Development System staff attending:

Bridget Alexander
Ed Dennehy

Meeting called to order 8:05AM

Consent Agenda:

February Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve meeting minutes by Mr. Travers

Motion to approve Seconded by Mr. Correia

Approved unanimously

Ms. Alexander went over the WIB's draft plan for use of economic stimulus dollars coming to the WIB. [Please see attached "Draft Plan."](#) Mr. Dennehy commented on the need for Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages due to the region's low level of educational attainment and non-native speakers. Ms. Alexander added that based on her polling of employers, the skill most requested was general work readiness.

Mr. O'Neil asked whether employers are targeted and where the individuals trained come from. Mr. Dennehy responded, stating that employers can apply for Workforce Training Funds ("WTF") for their existing/incumbent employees and participants/customers just come in off the street.

Ms. Lemieux, of the United Healthcare Workers East labor union, shared that they have had some success with WTF trainings, but employers don't feel like their getting the bang for the buck – employers are paying wages during these trainings and the employees/participants don't show up. Mr. Dennehy noted that WTF is a tough sell sometimes. Mr. O'Neil asked Mr. Nascimento, President of the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce, if he had heard the same comments. "Are they [businesses] not aware or are they not interested in running the programs?" Mr. Nascimento commented that it is disappointing that employers are paying into WTF and not using it. Ms. Lemieux pointed out that companies are staffed to the bare minimum and to lose employees for this level of training time is too hard to do for many of them.

Mr. Dennehy added that manufacturing training, like lean manufacturing does make sense and employers do see the value. Mr. Correia agreed, stating that WTF training works for companies that get a direct return on their investment – like lean manufacturing. Mr. Correia went on to add that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is a secondary training because employers can usually find

someone who can speak English to fill their open positions. Ms. Lemieux pointed out that the problem is that employers are hiring people that don't speak and understand English clearly and it's creating a safety hazard. Non-English speaking employees are not able/prepared to respond in an emergency situation.

Ms. Alexander brought up the need she sees in the WIB office for a Business Services Coordinator to promote WTF and coordinate with the Career Centers' business services teams and the New Bedford Area Chamber of Commerce. In general, this position would increase outreach and education to the region's businesses on what services and resources are available to them through the WIB, that Chamber and the Commonwealth. She went on to explain the need for a second position for Program Coordinator to support the Youth Council Director/Youth Programs and provide communications support.

Mr. Nascimento commented that he thought the business services position was a great idea and that there are a lot of businesses out there we can work with.

Mr. O'Neil asked what we are doing for small businesses - the backbone of our region - how do we get them over the hump? Ms. Lemieux asked if we are doing everything we can to enhance vendors/service providers/small businesses programs and organizations.

Ms. Alexander commented: the bottom line is that we don't have the staff to operate too far beyond WIA. Services, fundraising and communications (promoting our successes) are three different jobs and we need another layer of staff. The person working on the funding can't be the same person reporting on it and also be the same person implementing the program. The reality is, without more staff we need to cut back the expectations of what we will be able to do; if we want to produce quality product.

Ms. Lemieux commented that she thinks that staff do a fabulous job and make the job of committee members much easier. She supports the adding of staff to support that work, but questioned whether funding two positions for one year would make a sufficient impact/lasting change. Ms. Hantman and Ms. Lemieux pondered whether the two positions could be one. Ms. Alexander responded that, in her opinion, the two positions were too distinct to be one person and the business services position would be largely out of the office while the communications coordinator position would be largely in the office.

Mr. O'Neil stated that we have a good idea of what we need, whether it's one or one and half staff positions... He commented that we want to try and keep staff static as possible and lower staff turnover rates.

Mr. Correia reiterated the idea of combining the two positions into one or in the alternative, hiring one person with a business focus and get a consultant on the side for writing/communications. Ms. Alexander commented that consultants are very expensive and suck up staff time because they don't understand how our workforce system works and then they are just temporary.

Ms. Hantman noted that other areas/organizations are cutting people, and the sustainability piece is what really needs to be looked at- these potential new hires could get some momentum going, but if there is no money to keep them employed and they have to leave after a year we might be even further behind then when we started.

Mr. Dennehy pointed out that the important connection to be made here is between these positions and jobs for Career Center customers – pin that down –the bottom line is if hiring new staff on the WIB level does not result in more jobs for Career Center jobseekers then we can't do it.

Mr. O'Neil commented on the relationship between economic development and the Career Centers/WIB – and how a staff person focusing on business services could make those connections come together. "I think the opportunities are out there but I don't think they [businesses] completely understand what they are. If we take away the ambiguity and make it clear we'll get more buy-in – even in regard to Board membership. Also, I think you'll raise the eye brow of the business community not only in New Bedford but the other towns..."

Ms. Lemieux stated that we are transitioning – there are more opportunities coming into the workforce development system, such as green jobs, weatherization, marine science – and these new staff positions would allow us to focus.

Ms. Alexander went through a proposal for the rebranding/logo/website changes the committee's marketing working group had been focusing on. [Please see attached proposal.](#)

VOTE:

Chris put forward a motion to recommend to the Executive Committee to fund the rebranding/logo/website project and the hiring of one full time Business Services Coordinator and one full time Program Coordinator.

Motion seconded by Mr. Shea.

Recommendation was unanimous.

Mr. Nascimento recommended that Business Development Committee members be involved in the interview process for these two positions.

Ms. Alexander went over public forum. [See attached "Community Forum Flyer."](#)

Mr. O'Neil asked Mr. Dennehy where the Career Centers get their information on the region's businesses. Mr. Dennehy responded that the Career Centers currently work with about 600 businesses, which generates about 15 placements a month. Mr. Dennehy commented that all businesses in the region don't need our services and there are about 6000 employers in the region. Mr. Dennehy went on to state that one area the WIB and Career Centers could improve in is the identifying what employers are looking for and providing jobseekers with that training. This is the skills gap.

Chairman O'Neil asked if there was any New Business or Comments and there were none.

Mr. O'Neil made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Shea at 9:10 AM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Bridget A. Alexander, Esq.