

Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee of the Monroe County/Rochester Workforce Development Board
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 7, 2023
8:00 to 9:00 AM
Meeting Scheduled via ZOOM

Present: Elizabeth O'Brien, Jarmani Dozier, Joe Wesley, Raegen Lawrence, Cherie Becker, Edie Arlauckas, Shawna Gareau-Kurtz

Staff and Guest: Dave Seeley, Lee Koslow, Mary McKeown, Viatta Carter, Antwan Williams, Marisol Young, Laura Seelman

Approval of Minutes:

A motion to approve the December 6, 2022 meeting minutes was made by Joe Wesley and seconded by Jarmani Dozier. The motion was carried unanimously.

WIOA Adult/Dislocated Worker Program Performance, July - September 2022:

Lee Koslow began this discussion by reviewing Adult and Dislocated Worker Performance, 1st Quarter, Program Year 2022, on the WIOA primary indicators of performance for Monroe County. We have 5 different Primary Indicators of Performance that we are measured on with our Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Programs. This committee looks at Adults and Dislocated Workers. The Youth Committee will look at the Youth Performance. There is 1 more measure, Effectiveness in Serving Business Customers, that is not measured on the local level. It is only measured statewide, so we cannot look at that in terms of our Monroe County Local Workforce Development Area Performance. Performance is summarized in the Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee slideshow.

Revisions to Policy 101 Priority of Service and Policy 103 Supportive Services:

Lee Koslow began this discussion by noting the following on these policies:

- Purpose: To align our local policy with NYSDOL Technical Advisory #23-01, Serving Priority Populations and Priority of Service under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult Program.
- Changes required under this realignment will impact services to participants in the WIOA Adult program.

Lee reported that revisions to these 2 policies were needed. The New York State Department of Labor recently released a Technical Advisory on Serving Priority Populations and Priority of Service under WIOA Adult Programs. Under WIOA, there are 3 populations that are supposed to receive Priority of Service, which include:

- 1) Where services are not limited, they will get those services first.
- 2) Where services are limited, they will get those services. Others not in those priority populations will not, because there are not enough training services or supportive services to go around.

Federal priority populations are people on Public Assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, including English language learners. We also have some local priority populations, depending on the service, including low-income employed workers. Under the Federal law, Veterans also get Priority of Service. If there is a service that they are eligible for, they will get that service first, and they will be first in line for that service. The Technical Advisory has created 3 additional Priority Populations that are State priorities, that we now need to align our local policy with, so they are also getting Priority of Service. These are individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents (including single pregnant women).

Two of these populations we have really been focusing on. They just were not in our Priority of Service Policy. These changes require a policy realignment, and normally, if we needed to do a realignment due to a change in Federal or State policy, it would not have to go before the Board, unless this change is going to significantly impact the way services are delivered to our participants, and in this case it would, because we have these new Priority Populations that are now going to be able to receive services, either that they were not able to receive before or earlier than they were receiving them before.

Lee shared a table of information that explains the Levels of Service, who the Current Priority Populations include and who the New Priority Populations would be. This is under our Policy 101, Priority of Service and Policy 103, Supportive Services.

- All, Veterans and eligible spouses already have Priority of Service, that will not change.
- Individualized Career Services, things such as a comprehensive assessment and an Individualized Employment Plan, those services were previously offered first to Public Assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. We will need to add in, to comply with the State policy, individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents (including single pregnant women).
- ITA Training Services, we previously served those same 3 Priority Populations that are required in the Federal law, but in addition to that, for low income individuals, we included those who would be low income, but they may not be, just because they are receiving unemployment benefits or child support. We also included employed workers who are earning \$20.05/hour or less. To comply with the State policy, we will be adding in individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents (including single pregnant women).
- OJT, Customized Training Services, and Transitional Jobs, we were serving our 3 Priority Populations, plus all individuals in need of Career Development Services. These are individuals that were not categorized as Job Search Ready, because either they did not have a career goal, they did not have the skill level they needed for their career goal, or they had barriers that needed to be addressed. To comply with the State policy, we will be adding in individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents (including single pregnant women).
- For Supportive Services, Veterans and eligible spouses received priority before and they will continue to receive priority. Previously, we would serve all unemployed individuals as our Priority Population, plus public assistance recipients, plus other low-income individuals who happen to be employed, even if it is unemployment benefits or child support that puts them over the limit, as well as any employed workers who may not meet the low-income threshold, but who are earning \$20.05/hour or less. We will be adding in the 3 State Priority Populations in the policy: individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents (including single pregnant women).

There are some questions that we submitted to the New York State Department of Labor's Policy Unit. The answers were not clear in the State policy. The following questions are awaiting resolution:

- 1) Must we make training services available to Veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in the 3 WIOA Adult Priority Populations? **Update:** We received the answer that, yes, we must make all services available to veterans and eligible spouses as priority populations.
- 2) Must we make training services available to individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and single parents who are not included in the 3 WIOA Adult Priority Populations? **Update:** We received the answer that, yes, we must make all services available to all state priority populations.
- 3) If so, must we also make training services available to Veterans and their eligible spouses who are neither included in the 3 WIOA Adult Priority Populations nor the 3 additional NYSDOL Priority Populations? **Update:** We received a "yes" as the answer to this question as well.

As we await these answers, we are asking for some recommendations from this committee, first to recommend that yes, we agree that we ought to comply with the State policy and add these 3 Priority Populations to all of these different services. Secondly, we are hoping for answers to these 3 questions before the Board Meeting, so that we can get a complete policy to the Board. If we do not have these answers, we may want to hold off until June, because the answers are significant enough that we do not really want to go back and forth and have 2 different policies that are going to confuse Staff in the interim.

We are thinking that we would recommend keeping things as is for the Veterans. For questions #1 and #3, if the State says if a Veteran is not in 1 of those Priority Populations, if they are high-income, if they are not basic skills deficient, or an English language learner, they are not receiving Public Assistance, then no, you would not offer them training, but if they are, you would offer them training first. This is what we would recommend if we have the flexibility, but we have to wait and see. For question #2, our thinking is yes, even if they are not low income, we would still extend training services to individuals with disabilities, justice-involved individuals and single parents, just because those Priority Populations, because of the barriers would demonstrate that higher level of need. **Update:** We have learned that we do not have this flexibility. So we will be recommending to the Board that veterans, other federal priority populations, state priority populations, and our local priority populations will all receive priority of service.

The following thoughts, comments, and questions were shared on the direction we are thinking about on this policy:

- As RochesterWorks is a service organization agency, do you have limited resources that you are excluding those populations right now, or do you have capacity right now and is it really a moot point of excluding or including them? For example, for anyone that walks in the door who has a need for development, are you accepting them?
 - Lee responded that it depends on the service. For our services that are provided by a staff member, like our career services, our individualized career services, or our basic career services, we do not have limited capacity. For those services where we are paying an outside provider, that is where we are limited because we have a certain budget.

A motion to recommend these 2 policy changes for approval to the Board was made by Joe Wesley and seconded by Elizabeth O'Brien. The motion was carried unanimously.

Featured Discussion: Final Recommendation on Local Self-Sufficiency Wage:

As an introduction to this discussion, Lee Koslow noted that we have discussed this local self-sufficiency wage twice already, and we are hoping to be able to conclude the discussion today. We have let enough time go by to see whether the ALICE wage gets updated, and it did not. There is a good alternative, MIT's Living Wage. We have checked that out and have done some calculations on what the composition of the individuals that we serve looks like. As a reminder, this is not related to the Priority of Service. Self-Sufficiency is the wage above which a WIOA Adult would not need training, because they have already achieved self-sufficiency, which currently is \$25/hour.

To help prepare committee members in making this decision, Lee summarized our discussion as follows:

- The calculation needs to be simple. Therefore, we should continue to go with one wage level, regardless of family composition.
- When making a decision on the wage level, we should take into account either the most common family composition, or the most common family composition in need of our services.
- We need to select a measurement benchmark that is reasonable, is updated regularly, and gives data that is accurate for Monroe County. Both the ALICE self-sufficiency wage and the MIT Living Wage were suggested.

Lee reviewed some census data on Family Composition for Monroe County and Rochester City in the Workforce Innovation and Performance Committee slideshow. Based on the comparisons, the one adult, one child composition makes the most sense. However, when considering a reasonable wage, most people are not earning \$34.87/hour.

Lee also reviewed the Wage Distribution for all occupations in the 9-county Finger Lakes Region. We could:

- Adopt the \$34.87 per hour wage based on the MIT Living Wage calculator, even though it is not as reasonable a choice,
- Adopt the regional Mean Wage (\$28.29/hour) or 75th Percentile hourly wage (\$31.64/hour), or
- Choose some other benchmark.

Lee opened up the floor for group discussion for thoughts on this topic. Which one do we adopt? Do we adopt the \$34.87 MIT Living Wage, acknowledging that it might not be attainable? Do we want to adopt the Mean Wage, saying what we want is the most reasonable wage? Or do we adopt the 75th Percentile wage, which is kind of splitting the difference? Discussion included the following:

- When was the last time this number has been changed and when may it change again?
 - Lee commented that as to when was it last updated, this \$25/hour self-sufficiency wage goes back so far that we don't think anybody at RochesterWorks remembers when it was set or how it was selected. It was more than 15+ years ago. For a long time, we were the highest self-sufficiency wage in the State. It will be updated annually, depending on which one we choose. It will be updated either way. The MIT Living Wage is updated annually, so our self-sufficiency wage would follow those updates. If we choose to go with the Occupational Wage from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics that are published by the NYSDOL and USDOL, that wage is also updated annually, so the self-sufficiency wage would update automatically when that one updates.
- When establishing this threshold, what does that do? Does it establish somebody's availability for services at RochesterWorks?
 - Lee responded yes, with certain services. First, it is required under WIOA Law, because it is the goal toward which all of our staff are trying to move an adult job seeker. If someone is earning less than this wage, then they need services and we will provide them with services. Second, there are certain services that if you are a non-Dislocated Worker adult, if you are earning more than that, you are just not eligible for it, including ITA Training and OJT Grants.
- If someone was making \$34.00, and this is based upon the cost of goods and services, will receiving the training take them over the threshold of \$34.00 and their ability to earn more money?
 - Lee responded that you would have to pick a particular training that would increase your income if you were earning that much and wanted some training. It is a very individualized determination. For an OJT Grant, the employer sets the wage. It is not that you are earning \$34.87/hour now, you might be unemployed now, and the employer is trying to hire you with an OJT Grant for a job that pays \$32.00/hour. We cannot do that right now.
- Lee added that when we make this recommendation to the Board, he encourages this committee not to think of it as what is this going to do in terms of lots of people who were not getting training before getting it, or lots of people who were not getting services before getting it. It might impact 1 or 2 and make things fair for them but it is not going to impact a whole lot of individuals who were previously not getting services. This is more of a visual goal that we are setting. It is more of a goal in front of staff, in front of participants, and it is more of a statement probably than anything else, though required in the law.
- Lee commented that we are setting a self-sufficiency wage. If we set it high, is anyone concerned that our staff or our partner staff could look at that and compare it to their own wages, possibly prompting a request for a raise? He added that on a good note, he does not recall anyone coming forward when it was \$25.00 and asking for a raise, so maybe that will not really happen.
- Lee concluded this discussion sounds like we are hearing a little bit more support of the \$34.87 wage. Do we want to take a vote to see who is in favor of the \$34.87 MIT Living Wage, and if we get a majority, go ahead with that? If not, then we will see what everybody is thinking differently.

- Lee proceeded with asking the committee members to vote on the following: How many of you are in favor of the \$34.87? Lee tallied the votes and confirmed that we have a majority. This will be what we present to the Board, the MIT Living Wage \$34.87.

Lee thanked everyone for the very good, thoughtful discussion today.

Next Meeting Scheduled: June 6, 2023

Meeting adjourned at 9:02 AM

Submitted by: Mary McKeown

Reviewed by:

Lee Koslow 3/20/2023