

Memo to: LaDawn Burnett, Senior Policy Advisor  
Office of the Governor

From: Women Employed, Chicago Jobs Council & other workforce development advocates\*

Date: May 7, 2009

Following our meeting on April 7 on the Recovery Act, the workforce development advocates reconvened to develop ideas for how the Governor's office might promote community involvement in order to reach people targeted for priority of service in workforce development activities funded under the Recovery Act and in order to ensure equity and transparency of investments and outcomes.

### **Promoting Community Involvement**

Women, minorities, immigrants, and the hard-to-employ are over-represented in the low income population who are the priority for services under the Recovery Act's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) adult provisions (see TEGL 14-08, p. 7). Moreover, Department of Labor's guidance calls for state, regional and local workforce development strategies to include "...robust approaches to helping these workers access training and employment services that advance them along career pathways in high-growth industries, and help them gain access to and remain in the middle class."

However, many low-income individuals have not been served in some local workforce investment areas (LWIAs) because of disincentives in the structure of WIA and limited funding. The increase in WIA funds combined with the Recovery Act's priority for these underserved populations is a critical opportunity to improve access to services and to develop strategies to help them access educational pathways to better jobs.

In order to succeed in skills training and education these populations often require additional services (e.g., case management, academic and career advisement, needs-related payment, tutoring, childcare support, etc.). Many community-based organizations (CBOs) and community college systems have established programs and services that help low-income individuals successfully complete job training and secure jobs placement.

Therefore, we ask the Governor's office and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to dedicate statewide WIA discretionary resources for state activities that will support these priority populations. We understand that DCEO is planning to use discretionary WIA Adult funds to further develop sector-based training strategies and to prioritize the development of bridge strategies, and our suggestions are intended to be consistent with that priority and to strengthen Illinois' local strategies under the Recovery Act to be consistent with the priorities outlined under the Act and its guidance. Without state level leadership and resources, we are concerned that these populations will continue to be underserved.

Given the doubling of WIA funds to Illinois under the Recovery Act and the speed with which these funds are intended to be spent, a coordinated effort will ensure that Recovery Act funds are spent quickly but wisely to help our state's key industries get back on line and to ensure that women, minorities, immigrants, and low-income people share in our future prosperity.

#### **We recommend that the Governor's Office:**

1. Convene a strategy team to plan for ensuring that priority populations are served through both local implementation and through the use of state-level discretionary funds. The team should include DCEO, LWIAs, ICCB, Community Colleges, and CBOs. At a minimum, the team should set a goal for the number of new community partnerships that will be created that include LWIAs, CBOs, and community college training providers, and determine ways to promote and support such

partnerships. The goal of the partnerships would be to implement strategies that enable low-income people to better access and succeed in workforce training.

2. Take the following steps to increase the number of local partnerships amongst LWIAs, community-based organizations and community colleges:

- Competitive grants that use WIA discretionary funds should be inclusive of training for new workers, as well as incumbent workers. We believe this flexibility can accommodate the needs of each sector.
- Competitive grants that use WIA discretionary funds should be administered so that there is an incentive to serve priority populations, as well as other workers. We recommend weighting or giving points to grants that have these 3 elements:
  - a. Bridge program components or programs that lead to bridges (e.g., transitional job programs)
  - b. Evidence of partnerships with CBOs or community colleges; and
  - c. Support services.
- Set aside WIA discretionary funds to provide technical assistance for building partnerships between LWIAs, CBOs, and community colleges, including: facilitating LWIA contracting for training with community colleges and other training entities and developing bridge programs that lead to career pathways.

### **Ensuring Equity and Transparency**

In addition to providing technical assistance and facilitating partnerships with community-based organizations and community colleges to honor priority of service requirements in the Recovery Act, the state should take active steps to establish equity across fields of investment to ensure that the majority of investments are not in traditionally male dominated fields. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that sectors dominated by women, minorities, immigrants, and low-income people are among the top industries experiencing employment declines (e.g., retail trade is among industries experiencing the highest employment declines in the US and leisure and hospitality is among industries experiencing the highest declines in Chicago.) In addition, the Recovery Act specifically targets resources to maintain and increase jobs in education and healthcare.

In order to ensure equity of investments and outcomes, **we recommend that DCEO:**

1. Develop a system to track the process and achievement of federal goals in this area, including setting aside resources to gather and analyze data on the process and outcomes of equity efforts so that there is a barometer of progress and clear indicators that will alert the state to areas where additional investment or policy change is needed.
2. Take advantage of federal policy that allows states to set aside up to 6% of road and bridge construction funds for training (e.g. 6% for transportation) and use those funds to recruit and train targeted populations.
3. Expand the state's use of its [Corporate Accountability Progress Report tool](#) and include information not only on the number jobs created under the Recovery Act but also the on the type and quality of those jobs (e.g., total hours of work generated by broad occupational categories, number of workers, total payroll and extent of healthcare coverage). The tool should also include demographic information on the workers moving into those jobs such as gender, race, and socio-economic status.

4. Improve communication of the implementation process and outcomes online or with regular in-person updates. As implementation moves forward, there is a risk that important information won't reach outside of the internal process.

\*This document is drawn from discussions that have included 16 advocacy organizations: Women Employed, Chicago Jobs Council, Center for Economic Progress, Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, The Chicago Urban League, Good Jobs First – Illinois, Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Jane Addams Resource Corporation, Mid-America Institute on Poverty, National Transitional Jobs Network, Policy Planning Partners, Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, and The Workforce Alliance. Participation in this group does not necessarily imply formal sign on by the organizations listed.