

**Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board**

# **Strategic Plan**

**April 2003**

## Vision, Mission, Stakeholders: Why the WIB Exists and Who it Serve

The Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) was created under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) legislation. In general terms, its primary legislated responsibility is to provide policy direction and oversight for a number of specified programs and activities in Ramsey County and the entire East Metro region, working in partnership with employers and a host of workforce development agencies and programs.

### Vision

To maintain and improve the economic vitality of the Ramsey County East Metropolitan Area by developing the best-trained, best-educated, and most highly skilled workforce.

### Mission

To meet the needs of both employers and job seekers by providing the most responsive, flexible and comprehensive workforce preparation and employment system possible.

### Stakeholders

The WIB recognizes two distinct stakeholder groups: primary customers and supporting customers. Each group has different needs, and different strategies are required to meet the needs of each. The two groups are defined and further segmented below.

- Primary customers are those who directly benefit from the WIB's work; whose lives are changed; who must be satisfied for the WIB to meet its mission. These are the direct recipients of the WIB's services.

The WIB's primary customers are:

1. Employers, segmented as those who need...

- employees
- employee training
- recruitment
- other services and information

2. Workers, segmented as those who need...

- jobs
- training
- workforce preparation or career development
- other services

3. Potential workers (the inactive unemployed)

4. Education and training organizations and labor organizations

- Supporting customers are those who derive satisfaction or value from supporting the WIB. These are the organizations and individuals who provide resources of all kinds to the WIB.

Major segments of supporting customers are...

- Funding agencies
- Regulatory agencies and policy makers
- Economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and other business associations

- Providers of training and other services
- Community groups and organizations, such as neighborhoods, families, and faith based groups
- Workforce Solutions Department and One-Stops

## **Situation Analysis: External Forces and Internal Capabilities**

In approaching its work in Ramsey County and the East Metro area, the WIB recognizes that the region's changing socioeconomic, demographic, and political conditions drive not only what needs to be done but also how it can best be undertaken. Some of these conditions present opportunities to be leveraged; others present challenges to be overcome. Similarly, the WIB itself and the workforce preparation and employment system in East Metro have some inherent strengths to be leveraged and some vulnerabilities to be guarded against.

### **Strengths**

Listed here, in order of priority, are characteristics and conditions that constitute the key strengths of the WIB and the workforce preparation and employment system. These strengths, if exploited, will help drive the WIB's success:

- A large number and variety of committed employers in the East Metro area, some quite large, that offer a breadth of employment opportunities
- Abundant, high-quality training and secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities and providers
- A high quality, diverse workforce
- A wide range of committed, experienced workforce development providers, many of whom are represented on the WIB, with a wealth of resources
- A supportive regional political environment

### **Vulnerabilities**

However, the WIB must also be aware of and plan contingencies for addressing some critical vulnerabilities as it proceeds with its work. Some of the vulnerabilities are inherent; others are conditions that could arise from ineffective actions or missteps. Listed here, in order of magnitude of potential impact, are the key vulnerabilities identified:

- Failure to focus on the customers' and employers' needs
- Lack of universal agreement on viable solutions
- Failure to include all aspects of the workforce system in planning and decision-making
- Losing any partners
- Economic downturn leading to business retrenchment
- Providers doing business as usual, such as moving too slowly
- Securing funding that is inconsistent with WIB goals

### **Opportunities**

Analysis of external conditions and needs within the region reveals a number of opportunities and circumstances that the WIB can also leverage into successful outcomes. These include, in priority order, opportunities to:

- Engage employers in helping to educate the community about the workforce development system and the advantages presented by the region's diversity
- Influence policy makers and political leaders
- Leverage the strong customer focus already exhibited by service providers

- Identify, map, and align existing resources within the system, linking the provider network and improving coordination and communication with stakeholders
- Open more doors to career advancement for entry level and underemployed workers
- Be a leader of system change to break cycle of poverty via job training and other services for unemployed and underemployed populations

### **Threats**

At the same time, the WIB must be cognizant of and prepared to counter a number of conditions, existing or potential, that may threaten the success of its work. The most significant of those are listed in priority order:

- The potential for policy makers and funders, rather than customers, to drive the system
- Lack of alignment between supply and demand of jobs and job seekers
- Major political changes, such as termination of WIA, funding cuts, statewide restructuring of WIBs, or other such actions
- Limited resources, limited knowledge of available resources, or ineffective use of resources for transportation, childcare, housing, training, etc.
- Difficulty in clearly and effectively communicating about the workforce preparation and employment system
- Inability of the system to target and serve chronically hard-to-employ populations
- Resistance to change
- Diversity in all aspects of the term

## **Operating Principles: How the WIB Conducts Business**

While commitment to shared vision, mission, and goals is critical to the WIB's success, members concur that mutual commitment to a set of principles of conduct is also crucial. For this reason, the WIB endorses and adopts these principles as imperatives for perpetuating successful, effective operation.

### 1. Sustain customer focus.

In all aspects of its work, the WIB recognizes the extreme importance of listening to primary customers—those who directly benefit from the WIB's work. While the WIB must also be responsive to and cooperate with supporting customers—those partners and others who derive value from supporting the WIB's work—the WIB must first be responsive to the voices of employers and to members of the current and future workforce. In addition, the WIB must be inclusive of all the diversity that comprises these customer groups.

### 2. Focus on ends, not means.

WIB members recognize that many approaches will serve to accomplish goals and carry out strategies. They also recognize that priorities must necessarily change as external conditions change. For this reason, the WIB commits to remaining flexible, to annually assessing goals and priorities and adjusting strategies and tactics accordingly, and to keeping an eye on the big picture so as not to lose sight of objectives.

### 3. Leverage resources.

Resources are always limited. So the WIB will constantly seek ways to leverage government dollars with private dollars, to deploy resources effectively across the community, and to utilize the most appropriate service provider(s) for each customer need.

4. Communicate with the community.  
WIB members understand that the best of services will go unnoticed and underutilized if the community is not aware of the workforce preparation and employment system's services. The WIB will work relentlessly to inform East Metro community members about what it accomplishes and what it offers.
5. Employ creative collaboration and risk taking.  
An important objective for creating the WIB was to unify the parallel but often disparate efforts of the many contributors to workforce development in the East Metro. WIB members therefore commit to adopting truly collaborative practices to eliminate "turf issues," to forthrightly addressing points of contention, to offering alternatives to unacceptable proposals, to practicing creative thinking and innovation, and to being willing to take risks.
6. Capitalize on opportunities to exert influence.  
WIB members recognize that the WIB is in a unique position to inform and influence policy makers and other supporting customers and stakeholders within the community. For this reason, WIB members commit to providing leadership across all sectors, public and private, and across all stakeholder groups. They also commit to testing the boundaries of the WIB's influence in the effort to develop and sustain an outstanding workforce preparation and employment system.

## **Goals: What the WIB Will Accomplish**

In view of its vision and mission and the realities of the environment in which it is chartered to perform, the WIB strives to accomplish two overarching goals:

Goal 1: Satisfy Primary Customers

Goal 2: Link Current and Potential Workers With Jobs and Careers

If these two goals are achieved, the WIB will fulfill its mission. All of the strategic initiatives undertaken by the WIB must support and enable achievement of these two critical goals.

## **Strategies and Tactical Directions: How the WIB Achieves its Goals**

The WIB identifies a small number of strategies as being pivotal in accomplishing each of the goals. By focusing its resources on these specific strategic actions, the WIB will consistently show measurable progress toward meeting each goal. The WIB also outlined representative implementation tactics for carrying out each strategy. While exact tactics are likely to vary as work proceeds, those listed here, if not executed exactly as described, are examples of approaches to the strategies.

### **Goal 1: Satisfy Primary Customers**

#### Strategy 1

Design and implement a system for determining and tracking customer needs and satisfaction.

##### Representative Tactics:

- Conduct a customer needs analysis (both workers and employers) to determine what customers need from the system.

- Implement methods--“listening mechanisms”--to measure customer satisfaction. This involves developing ways for every customer who uses the system to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and overseeing customer service measures for the HHH Job Corps, One Stops, and Workforce Solutions.
- Identify current and future job needs of employers.
- Understand current job vacancies and where they are.

### Strategy 2

Improve the system for customers.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Set system performance goals based on customer needs as verified in Strategy 1.
- Develop systems to meet those goals, assuring provision of real solutions to real customer problems, needs, and wants. This includes providing well prepared employees; real job opportunities for workers; skill development opportunities, including for younger (14-21) and older (65+) workers; and training opportunities that meet current and future needs of the labor market.
- Invest in assuring the quality of front-line, point of contact workers, including highly skilled and educated One Stop staff.
- Develop systems to measure and report goal progress back to customers.
- Make the system transparent to customers.
- Establish continuous improvement tools for the workforce system.
- Identify issues as to why people are not employed, then strategize to meet the needs of those who are not working.
- Find and capitalize on best practices in workforce development—become a society of workforce development practitioners.

## **Goal 2: Link Current and Potential Workers With Jobs and Careers**

### Strategy 1

Establish the WIB as a community leader in workforce development, engaging and bringing stakeholders together to do collaborative work.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Link economic development, workforce development, and business development to keep and attract workers.
- Create and convene stakeholder forums, including education.
- Establish strategy teams to recognize and develop best practices.
- Create strategic alliances between public and private ventures.
- Serve as framework for linking diverse resources serving employers, workers and potential workers in advancing workforce development.

### Strategy 2

Drive the system to leverage public and private resources.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Create an effective linking or networking model, or clearinghouse, to be used by everyone (employers, job seekers, and service providers.) Develop multiple entry points that provide access to the same information and messages. This may include a career exchange that co-locates employer and employee services, and may use the world wide web.

- Lobby for state and private funds for staff resources and for centralizing equitable services across Metro East.
- Do a “resource map” of all institutions, service providers, employers.
- Connect the education system with current and future customer needs.
- Integrate systems.

### Strategy 3

Expand workforce opportunities and participation, creatively engaging all workers including incumbent, potential, underutilized and underused workers.

#### Representative Tactics:

- Develop and promote “career laddering” and career advancement opportunities.
- Sponsor a “we need you as an employee” campaign.
- Create inter- and intra-company career paths.
- Identify and target Ramsey County populations (i.e., seniors, underemployed, etc.) and their needs.
- Identify issues as to why people are not employed, then strategize to meet the needs of those populations.
- Identify, develop, and promote support systems that prepare for and facilitate entry of people into the workplace.
- Broaden and simplify services to the unemployed.
- Formulate foreign-trained skill license transfer programs (e.g., for immigrant doctors trained other countries who are working here in menial positions.)
- Provide incentives to work—eliminate disincentives of all kinds.
- Create a system that reduces turnover and loss of workers, and then educate employers on how to use it expand and retain workforce participation.
- Educate employers on how to make flexible work environments that appeal to non-traditional workers. Educate employers and employees as to best practices around these issues.
- Shift employers’ mindset from “job” to “career” for workers.
- Design practices to keep employees in the current workforce beyond retirement age.
- Promote the need to make accommodations for potential workers.
- Promote workforce diversity as a strategic business advantage.
- Require assessment of job seekers at an early stage to identify career interests and needs.

#### Strategy 4

Establish and implement an aggressive marketing and communications plan for the WIB.

##### Representative Tactics:

- Develop and implement a marketing and communications plan that promotes a change in perception by all parties, especially with regard to the WIB's role in coordinating services. The plan must "sell" the WIB and its role in encouraging collaboration between members.
- Communicate with stakeholders.

#### **Structure: How the WIB is Organized to Carry Out its Mission**

The WIB's organizational structure emanates from its mission, goals, and operating principles, and is designed to facilitate effective, flexible, coordinated operations in carrying out strategies. This structure consists of four functional standing committees.

Additionally, the WIB is directly accountable to the Governor of the State of Minnesota and to the Ramsey County Board (the "chief elected official."). It is also bound by the terms of the Joint Powers Agreement exercised by the County and the City of St. Paul. The WIB's structure creates clear reporting lines to these bodies via the Executive Committee.

#### **The Committees**

##### Executive Committee:

To provide proactive overall leadership, drive and coordination of all WIB activities and to ensure sound decisions on funding and financial management for WIB related activities.

##### Communication, Advocacy and Oversight

To effectively communicate with the WIB's diverse stakeholders including advocating policy with the legislature, and to ensure that the WIB meets specific statutory obligations.

##### Market Driven Workforce Development System

To develop a workforce development plan that is based on understanding customer needs and market forces. To develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to drive workforce development alignment and ensure implementation of plan.

##### Youth Council

To develop, implement and monitor both a long-range plan for the Youth Council, and an annual plan for WIA Title 1 Youth and Minnesota Youth Program activities. Further to provide recommendations relative to policy direction and program oversight for implementation of WIA I and other funding for youth activities, and to coordinate and provide leadership of youth activities in the area.