

ILLINOIS OLDER WORKER TASK FORCE

c/o GREEN THUMB, INC. - ILLINOIS PROGRAM
129 S. JACKSON ST., P.O. BOX 769
HARRISBURG, ILLINOIS 62946-0769

PHONE: (618) 253-3700

FAX: (618) 253-3900

To: Dr. Robert Luther
From: Terry Edwards
Date: January 14, 2000
Re: Background information on IOWTF Recommendations

Recommendation #1: "A dual eligibility provision for WIA and Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) services should be established and publicized within the workforce development network."

Background: A dual eligibility provision will allow a person qualifying for SCSEP services to automatically be considered eligible for services under WIA. Since 1992, SCSEP operators have had this provision in place (through the JTPA Amendments of 1992) with JTPA programs. It is important to have the provision continued, since payments received in the form of work experience/training wages by SCSEP participants might otherwise have to be counted when determining WIA eligibility ---- thereby making the majority of SCSEP participants financially ineligible for WIA intensive and training services. Publicizing the provision will ensure its continuity of interpretation and timeliness of implementation.

Recommendation #2: "Older workers/individuals should be targeted for services in all Illinois Workforce Investment Areas."

Background: This recommendation is based on the assumption that draft guidance for WIA programs becomes final. In particular, it addresses the existing guidance that will require local Workforce Investment Boards to designate economically disadvantaged "special populations" to be targeted for services. The guidance also requires local WIA operators to spend a majority of funding (51% or more) on targeted populations - or - serve a majority of customers (51% or more) from targeted populations. With the removal of the Older Individual Program set-aside that existed under JTPA, targeting this special population is critical to ensuring that older workers will continue to receive intensive and training services through WIA.

Recommendation #3: "Participation of older workers in the SCSEP should not be considered employment for the purposes of determining whether or not a placement (entered employment) can be counted under WIA performance measures."

Background: Most SCSEP participants enter a paid work experience component whereby they work and train with government agencies and non-profit organizations. Since current WIA guidance would not allow local WIA operators to claim a placement (entered employment) for persons employed at the time of enrollment, it is critical to clearly define SCSEP participation as "training" ---- not "employment." With *placement/entered employment* being one of WIA's primary performance measures, this definition will remove potential WIA operator bias against SCSEP participants receiving intensive and training services.

Recommendation #4: "Payments received by participants from the SCSEP should not be considered 'wages' in determining pre-enrollment earnings under WIA performance measures."

Background: Like the reasoning explained in Recommendation #3, this recommendation is prompted by the need for a definition that will remove potential WIA operator bias against SCSEP participants --- which could have otherwise been created by their (WIA operator) need to meet a performance measure. This addresses the WIA performance measure dealing with the percentage of income gain/change, comparing pre-enrollment earnings to post-enrollment earnings. Many SCSEP participants prefer part-time employment and probably would not realize a gain that would meet the WIA standard ---- if SCSEP payments were included when establishing pre-enrollment earnings. *Conversely, with SCSEP payments excluded from the calculation, WIA operator performance on this measure would likely far exceed the expected level since most SCSEP participants experienced an extended period of unemployment or very low earnings prior to enrolling for SCSEP services.*

How Older Workers Should Be Served Under WIA

The Illinois Older Worker Task Force (IOWTF) is pleased to provide this position paper on how older workers can best be served both during and after Illinois' transition from the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Questions or comments regarding this paper can be directed to Terry Edwards, IOWTF Chair, at (618) 253-3700.

Defining Older Workers

The definition of "older worker" established for this position paper is "any person over the age of 55 who is now employed, or is seeking employment."

Informing Older Workers

In the past, many older workers learned of JTPA services through operators of the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) or other community based organizations. With the state's older adult population clearly the fastest growing segment, enhanced older worker awareness of training and employment opportunities is crucial to maintaining a strong workforce, business environment and economy in Illinois.

The Illinois Older Worker Task Force has planned, and will implement, a marketing campaign for older worker services information to its target population by July 1, 2000. Tasks identified in an action plan submitted to the HRIC/WIB Employment Opportunities Committee in July of 1999 calls for the following:

- Establish toll-free telephone (dedicated) access to service provider information
- Establish Internet-based (dedicated website) access to service provider information
- Generate & distribute printed materials to promote new access portals
- Publicize new access portals via Illinois news media

WIA Rules and Definitions

As the workforce development system approaches the sunset of JTPA and the dawn of WIA, there needs to be an awareness of the impact that state and local rules and definitions will have on older workers seeking services. The WIA's elimination of funds previously earmarked to serve low-income older workers (under JTPA) leaves "rules and definitions" as the only way many older workers enrolled in the SCSEP can receive intensive and training services under WIA. To address this issue, the IOWTF recommends:

- A dual eligibility provision for WIA and SCSEP services should be established and publicized within the workforce development network.
- Older workers/individuals should be designated as a special population targeted for services in all Illinois Workforce Investment Areas.
- Participation of older workers in the SCSEP should not be considered employment for the purposes of determining whether or not a placement (entered employment) can be counted under WIA performance measures.
- Payments received by participants from the SCSEP should not be considered "wages" in determining pre-enrollment earnings under WIA performance measures.

Serving Older Workers Through The One-Stop System

Critical Issues

- Identification of SCSEP partners and other older worker service providers (Signage, brochures, flyers, etc.)
- Clarity of all partner roles in one stops (Do customers know the menu of services and providers before they get to the reception desk?)
- Importance of educated reception: Routing older workers efficiently from the first point of contact to the appropriate partner. (Are staff easy to find in a cubicle maze?)
- Privacy and Confidentiality: Protecting the privacy of older worker background and financial information in a cubicle environment.

Understanding Older Workers

To successfully serve older workers in the WIA One-Stop system, all partners need to be aware of the unique needs, motivations and characteristics of the population. Older workers need to sense empathy and genuine interest from one-stop personnel in order to have a positive one-stop experience. Other key population factors worthy of consideration are:

- Impatience: Only the most desperate will wait long periods of time to see an agency representative. Those lacking in desperation will waste little time on pillar-to-post activities in government offices.
- Finance: The majority of persons over age 62 draw Social Security benefits as a base income and may only be interested in part-time employment. Those over age 65 may also be covered under Medicare and may be even less likely to be in need of, or interested in, full-time employment. Without a strong financial need, many older workers encountering systemic obstacles or delays may opt to not use the system - or- rethink the decision to seek employment.
- Competition: Many older workers needing training & employment assistance have avoided general public job assistance venues in the past due to anticipated competition with youth, a well-publicized perception of employer age discrimination -- and the general fear of being rejected.
- Self-Esteem: Being "retired" sounds better than being "unemployed." Many will under-represent their true need for employment income in order to maintain their self-respect. Only a system that allows older workers to retain (or help re-establish) their dignity at all points of service delivery, can effectively serve them.

Tap Local Expertise

Illinois Employment & Training Center (IETC) managers are encouraged to utilize SCSEP partners to help educate reception personnel and other appropriate IETC partners on common older worker service issues, as well as best practices in the delivery of reception, assessment, personal attention, support services, referral process and follow-up.