Western Kentucky Workforce Investment Area
Regional Input Session
October 21, 2011

NOTES

Participants represented the following organizations/ agencies:

- Madisonville Community College
- Madisonville-Hopkins County Economic Development Corporation
- Muhlenberg Alliance for Progress/Economic Development
- Office of Employment and Training-Hopkinsville and Madisonville
- Hopkins County Coal, LLC
- Douglas Autotech
- GE Aviation
- City of Greenville
- Jennmar West Kentucky
- Transcraft
- Cadiz-Trigg County Economic Development Commission
- West Kentucky Workforce Investment Board and Staff
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Hopkinsville Community College
- Job Corps
- FP International
- LG&E KU Energy, LLC
- Greater Muhlenberg Chamber of Commerce
- Christian Chamber of Commerce
- Christian County EDC
- Purchase Area Development District
- Riken Elastomers
- Pennyroyal Center
- Land O’Frost

There were approximately 30 participants plus WIA staff. Comments were also provided via email from Cadiz-Trigg County Economic Development Commission.

Rapid Response Activities

When a dislocation occurs, the Rapid Response Team makes sure to capture data and information to help with useful outcomes. For example, data is captured from dislocations about workers and their skill levels to help “re-sell” these workers to existing or new businesses, and for use by economic development.

Consolidation within companies means that a business is competing with sister locations. It becomes the partners’ job to help these businesses prepare for competition within their own company.
Western Kentucky has a lot of partnerships and experience working together. The partners use a roundtable approach. This means that if an email goes out at 11:00pm, the partner group comes together the next day to focus on the issue.

The Career Center and economic development are co-located at 2 sites. As an example of the success this has led to, economic development learned that a company was in need of rapid response and within thirty minutes a solution was being worked on in the Career Center.

During Rapid Response events, a workforce survey is conducted that collects information about skills, education levels, wage levels and information about how far he or she is willing to drive to work, etc. This information is put into a database.

In large Rapid Response events, the WIB has sponsored special dislocation centers in the community and worked with local leaders and elected officials in “Community Roundtable” events in order to keep everyone informed and focused on the issues.

**Recommendations for the Rapid Response System**

Money is needed to help individuals who are not part of a major, large layoff as current Dislocated Worker allocations are obligated. If they are a smaller group or an individual, they cannot access training funds.

If the Commonwealth chooses not to pursue a National Emergency Grant (NEG) for 125 individuals in western Kentucky, then these individuals will have no access to services as they are not Trade eligible. In both rapid response and business services, the team needs to avoid the “dog and pony show” at the Rapid Response initial event and really drive individuals and employers to the services available from the Career Center.

**Business Services Activities**

At one time, quarterly business services team meetings were being held in Frankfort. There is a need to talk about things if they need to be changed. But, if these are going to be held, they should be held via conference call and utilizing technology to make the most of everyone’s time.

Trust and professionalism are key to working together. If the partnership is built on trust and professionalism, then it doesn’t matter if a team member is sick or unavailable, because the other team members can pick up and fill in for him or her. Easing the cross between systems relies on trust.

The team thinks of it as: *We* are serving employers, whether it is the college, economic development organization, OET or another agency actually offering assistance. This gets away from “I did this…”
One participant - an economic development representative – stated that this is the best workforce system he has seen is in Kentucky. He reported that it would be helpful to have a skills certification as a skills Work Ready Certificate or a report that allows an individual to say “I can do X, Y and Z...” that is validated. States such as North Carolina do this well; they can specifically say how many work ready people they have in skilled areas. A Work Ready Certificate must be meaningful to employers for people to be driven to it.

At all the community colleges, there has been a push to load national industry certificate programs that elevates an individuals’ status to employers that are standardized and recognized.

It’s not just business services, but also what comes before – attraction and working with economic development and chambers.

Business, the conversation can go in unexpected directions. The key to these conversations/ business outreach is to listen carefully because often the company is “telling you without telling you.” For example, the conversation may have initially have been focused on energy rates, but comments about skills or new equipment can suggest training needs.

A key question to ask is: how do we craft a response to businesses’ needs rapidly within the necessary timeframe. Businesses want solutions right now and do not want more paperwork.

Currently, the following organizations/ partners are outreaching to business:

- Economic development
- WIB – does not call on businesses unless they are invited, but network during SHRM meetings and get the word out broadly through industry associations, etc.
- Education institutions – sharing information about training opportunities, but do not knock on doors unless they are invited. These institutions have an open door policy.

As an example of the region’s existing network/ partnerships, economic development received word the day before the input session. An email was sent informing partners of the need for a meeting and eleven partners attended. There has been a lot of groundwork that has been laid in the region; everyone is willing to do their part.

Madisonville Community College offers a customized employer training program. Some employers are looking at creating a more educated workforce which means integrating credit and non-credit education and training. The college is using customized training (non-credit) as an entry way into academic (credit) training.

One of the employers participating in the discussion reported that he was able to access GIS from one of the partners and it helped him identify suppliers and similar companies to his by inputting NAICS codes. This tool played an important role in the company’s decision to location a site in the region.

A representative of one of the community colleges said that she was pleased to hear a presentation recently about entrepreneurial resources and support for businesses looking to develop international ties.
These were provided by the Economic Development Cabinet’s Office for International Trade. There can be more showcasing of this service within the Commonwealth.

In eastern Kentucky there is an effort to connect companies to international markets that partners in the western region could model. The partners could create a forum around this concept and bring a state-level expert in to share information with companies. This could provoke expansions.

One of the partners used “Operation Workforce” dollars from the WKWIB to create a video about entrepreneurship. There are different levels of targets from physicians to individuals who want to open a bowling alley.

The region’s partners have access to a database of every company in the county. To establish a baseline, information and notes are put into the database as partners meet with companies.

The resources to help businesses exist in our community, but it is a matter of knowing what a company needs. For example, a company was considering expanding in the region. During the first meeting, information about what they needed was collected. In the second meeting, a representative from the economic development cabinet attended and the company was also connected to the community college.

Entrepreneurship isn’t something that happens overnight. A culture and foundation to support it must first be developed. This is an important focus for the future.

For those attending Madisonville Community College, entrepreneurship classes are offered. The college targets individuals around 26-27 years old who have lost their jobs.

A representative from the coal industry commented that the workforce development system helped them get started, but now does not provide the same support. For example, when receiving assistance in the hiring process, he stated, “The people you want me to put to work, don’t make good coal miners.”

- If the coal industry could get job training support based on the percent of energy that it produces, the industry could take care of itself.
- Jobs in the coal industry pay excellent wages.
- “Green isn’t going to turn green ($)“.
- If the industry could get help again with incumbent worker and training, where individuals who are currently unemployed could be placed into the $10/ hour - $12/ hour positions, then the coal companies could move the workers currently in those jobs up into the $18/hour jobs.

A participating employer shared the following: The company has been through the whole cycle – locating in the region and starting up to growth to lay off. The company has received the following support:

- In order for his business to have qualified aluminum welders, they worked with the water cooled welders program at the Hopkinsville Community and Technical College.
• Economic development representatives offered tremendous help to survive during the recession.
• The WIB and the Career Center staff have been great. For example, they helped 300 people transition and gave hope to these people. The current system can’t be improved upon!

The problem is that the company’s jobs are hard work. They are hot in the summer, cold in the winter and require long hours. Many individuals quit after they realize that it’s hard work. There is an incentive now from the workforce system to hire someone that has been on unemployment for 21 weeks. But, along the 99 weeks of collecting unemployment, many people have forgotten how to work and don’t want to work even for a high wage.

There are several existing programs that are hard to fill. Department of Labor currently has an Advanced Manufacturing grant with the Hopkinsville Community College to upgrade skills, but can’t get people to sign up to participate. The WIB also has a National Emergency Grant (NEG) for long-term unemployed individuals, but employers are weary of getting these people in On-the-Job Training (OJT).

Madisonville Community College offers pre-employment services for new companies including profiling, understanding needs and conducting assessments that are legally defensible. Companies don’t want something else to do, so providing these services for them helps create a long-term relationship and also requires working with economic development, OET, WIA and other partners.

The Career Center assists businesses with standardized applications that become a database of applicants for them to review.

In regard to testing and assessments, the National Career Readiness Credential is utilized but not as heavily as in other areas. WorkKeys has not been embraced by large employers, but Hemlock is now requiring it so this may help build support. Manufacturers are currently using the TABE for assessing applicants in the region.

Economic development opened networking doors when a particular company came to the region. This company is working the community colleges on ways to lower turnover and increase proficiency.

One of the employers participating commented that the people attending the regional input session had previously helped his company through Rapid Response and did a fantastic job. He stated that staff does a good job of communicating funding opportunities and resources that are available.

Participants stated, “Communications are what we have going for us.”

One of the economic development partners reported that in regard to business services she uses:
• Industry reports
• Demographic reports
• State comparison reports on taxes and incentives with other states
• Marketing pieces for the community
• Community development research technical services – site evaluations, mapping, site development plans
• Training – on incentives, proposals, requests for information, etc.
• Additional resources available to put a deal together
• Refreshers on all training programs available and grants

She commented that data research per project request is very important.

Members of Christian County SHRM and Hopkins County SHRM were present. They commented that they have WIB staff present at all their meetings and know that SHRM meetings are a time that they can ask questions or set up appointments with staff for their needs. It is integral that staff attend these.

Recommendations for Business Services System

From an employer perspective, there needs to be consistency in the process and administration of business services. For example, a representative from the coal industry noted that he works with two WIBs because of various locations and there have been differences in how certain programs are run/offered between the two regions.

Economic development needs to be brought to events and work with the WIB. If the WIBs in the various areas aren’t up to par, then someone needs to be told of problems (at the state level).

Business liaisons should be encouraged to engage with and learn about economic development if they do not have knowledge of programs and economic development.

Forming a relationship with SHRM is critical if the area has a local chapter.

Systems need to be aggregated so that economic development can use it and also so that employers can access information without a gatekeeping. The current system is not user friendly. Example: E3

Participants suggested looking at ways the partners can gather data and share data to economic development for their needs.

Participants recommended using caution in describing the individual agency services to business as the services of the Community Colleges’ “Workforce Solutions” system differ from those of the Career Center, and the same/similar names of services may be confusing to employers.

Other Comments

Students in the Job Corps program know about programs, but criminal backgrounds prohibit them from enrolling. This leads to the Department of Labor thinking that the program is under-enrolled.

Work ethic is lacking and family structures are lacking so young workers don’t ever learn work ethic.