

MEMO

To: Julio Rodriguez,
Deputy Director, Illinois DCEO Office of Employment and Training

From: Beth A. Brinly, *Maher & Maher*

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Subject: Illinois Workforce Innovation Board Retreat and Meeting

In June 2016, Maher & Maher was contracted by Illinois to conduct a retreat for the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board resulting in recommendations of strategies and actions the Board can take to become more compliant to the expectations set forth by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA). The retreat was planned for a half-day session, taking place on June 16, 2016 along with a presentation at the Board meeting. The session was facilitated by Beth A. Brinly, Vice-President of Workforce Innovation, and Lynn Bajorek, Senior Consultant, at Maher & Maher.

Retreat and Meeting

With the required implementation of WIOA regulations coming into play, many State Workforce Development Boards are finding themselves unsure of how best to proceed to meet the needs of a changing landscape in the workforce development world.

The first segment of the retreat focused on the roles and responsibilities of the Board. Ms. Brinly and Board Members discussed the key elements of WIOA and their possible impact on the work of the Board and how the roles of the board members may change. Board members introduced themselves and shared what their experience has been with the Board.

Ms. Brinly then provided her vision of the future of the Workforce System, provided WIOA is fully implemented as intended. In many ways, WIOA is designed to break down the silos created by legislative actions of the past. In a world where WIOA is fully-implemented, the educational systems, economic development agencies, the workforce system and key industries, would work in tandem to develop and maintain an integrated Talent Pipeline. All of these systems would work together at the state level and regionally, beyond the traditional geographic boundaries currently accepted by the Board.

The six priorities of WIOA are to develop:

- Broader & Deeper Partnerships
- More Strategic State & Local Boards
- Regionalism
- Sector Strategies & Career Pathways
- Service Value & Integration
- Focus on Competition & Quality

The Board was provided with a potential framework for how strategies and tactics may work together under WIOA and how each of the priorities of WIOA might be able to be addressed in Illinois.

Ms. Bajorek then provided an overview of Illinois board member expectations and key provisions of the by-laws adopted by the Board. In addition, she outlined the foundational principles of the Adopt A Member program and gathered input from the board members about building out the program. Staff committed to developing the final Adopt A Member initiative with the input of the board members in mind.

Strategic vs. Tactical Boards

The second segment of the retreat was on distinguishing between strategic and tactical work of the Board. The presentation reinforced that the Board should be the keeper of a guiding vision and committed to identifying employer centric solutions. In addition, it is responsible for establishing an effective structure and measurement processes. The discussion, captured below, focused on actions the board would like to take around sector strategies.

State Sector Strategies:

- The board may identify state level sectors, however, the operationalization of them is done best at the regional level;
- The board can support sector strategies and partnerships through integrated policy development and technical assistance;
- State board members can serve as champions at the regional and local levels around sector partnership development;
- Identify and share resources that can support state and regional sector work; and
- Establish performance measures that would capture the impact of sectors work.

Break-out Sessions

The third segment of the retreat broke Board members out into two groups: 1) Business and Labor and 2) Interagency. The purpose of these break-outs was to discuss their specific roles on the Board.

Business and Labor

Ms. Brinly opened the session asking how they would like to make a difference while serving on the board. Some of the key interests are detailed below:

- Strong shared interest ensuring the population served is on the path to earning a livable wage;
- Importance of the employers and business sectors sharing the system's new sectors-based approach to a broader audience;
- Recognition that they are champions of business and need to bridge the talent supply development discussion with state and local system partners;
- Opportunities for new champions exist beyond just business and WIOA could support this expansion;
- Given all the new board members it is an excellent time to focus on the vision of the board in order to provide better focus on WIOA metrics and work of the board;
- Recruit other sectors that are not currently represented on the board; and
- Commitment of this group to engage at both the state and local levels of the system.

Engagement opportunities for business and labor representatives on the board include input in the following areas: customer service; streamlined resources; unified marketing and performance measuring; and talent pipeline development.

Recruitment activities that business and labor representatives can undertake to support the work of the board and the system with others are: committee engagement; business champions; sector partnership development; career pathway development; curriculum development; work-based learning; and State and Local Board service.

Education was the final focus area. Business and workforce representatives can uniquely educate other workforce stakeholders and community leaders regarding the objectives of the State Workforce Innovation Board and its strategic vision.

Interagency

Lynn Bajorek kicked off this break-out session exploring how as Board members they could support the implementation of the WIOA State Plan. As participants described what key words would be applied to successful implementation key characteristics included thriving, seamless, responsive, quality, flexible, innovative, and recognized. There was a discussion about the

technical assistance and support needed based on the local and regional plan review process. Finally, they brainstormed actions needed to move forward as interagency partners on the Board. Some of the key activities identified to undertake include:

- Need to promote industry sectors to change the perception of them by key stakeholders like educators, guidance counselors, parents and young people;
- Opportunity to positively promote the workforce system by all the partners in a cohesive and integrated way;
- A communication strategy between the state and local boards to ensure there is understanding regarding local flexibility and state level policy decisions;
- Apprise state board members of data, results from actions and best practices to support continuous improvement and policy development;
- Cross training opportunities are critical for staff as well as training on opportunities available through the system for businesses; and
- Address the braiding of resources to support the completion of stackable credentials that lead to bachelor's degrees as well as support apprenticeships.

Facilitated Discussion and Wrap-up

In the final segment of the retreat, a representative from each of the break-out groups discussed the key takeaways from their respective discussions. Beth Brinly then asked for board members to share their AHA moments from the retreat which included:

- A focus on meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities is important going forward;
- A significant number of Illinoisans have a previous criminal record and there is a need to create real opportunities for them;
- A platform for communication and discussion among board members regarding significant workforce challenges needs to be established to support solutions development;
- A collective impact approach (problem is bigger than any one partner and the solution only comes when working collectively) could be helpful as the board moves forward;
- There was alignment between the two break-outs regarding ways of advancing the work;
- Technology and business services are examples of sectors that impact all other sectors;
- Opportunity exists to engage those that are unemployed with the workforce system as many of them have good work histories and talents;
- The board is a great place to come together to have honest, respectful discussions of what is broken and how it can be fixed; and
- Find those things that are working well and share them with the entire state to bring about workforce change.

Co-Chair Rico then provided closing comments on the importance of a unified and engaged Board.

Illinois Workforce Innovation Board Meeting

The presentation at the Board meeting began with an overview of the Kentucky High Impact Workforce Development Board (WDB) Initiative. This session focused more on small-group discussions to lead to specific activities that the Board could undertake to ensure its status as a High Impact WDB and support development of High Impact WDBs at the local level.

Board members were asked to consider and discuss activities the Board could undertake in the three standard areas of the High Impact WDB standards: Strategic Planning and Implementation; Developing and Managing Resources; and Managing the Work of the Board. A sampling of potential activities identified by small groups of Board members in each Standard Area are outlined below.

Potential Board Activities:

Strategic Planning and Implementation

- Develop an Illinois strategic plan;
- Ensure policy directives from the board support that strategic vision; and

Create a dialogue between local boards and state board.

Developing and Managing Resources

- Asset mapping resources at the state level;
- Joint policy development among system partners; and
- Certification standards for Illinois workNet.

Managing the Work of the Board

- Share promising practices and participate in peer learning opportunities with other state boards;
- Provide technical assistance and support to regions and locals based on review of their respective plans; and
- Review data and determine what if any additional metrics the board may want to establish to support accountability and transparency.

Evaluation of the Retreat and Meeting

During the retreat with the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board, we found board members (and attending staff) to be engaged and interested in how they might better understand and embrace a future guided by the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and generally, how they might more actively be involved in building a better future for the residents of the state.

Members asked questions and actively participated. We did not witness the kind of resistance to change we commonly see in such settings, and even the more veteran members of the Board seemed open to new approaches to building a competitive workforce in Illinois.

Overall, our opinion is that most Board members are “willing” to proceed more strategically toward the future system we described and are welcoming of a bigger, more deliberate role moving forward. However, we do believe that many members will need more and deeper training/exposure to best practices and opportunities to lead the work of the Board in order to build their capacity to embrace a more strategic, active role in the future.

Recommendations

For the Board to grow into a more strategic role, they will need to embrace their role as the driver of workforce development in the state. That role requires better understanding of the need for state and regional collaboration as well as strategies for forming and engaging with business-led (sector) partnerships. The Board would benefit significantly from more exposure to emerging best practices from other areas around the State and country.

That might be accomplished by:

- Developing a true strategic plan for the Illinois workforce system that serves as the game plan for the interagency partners that could be reinforced in a charter signed by agency partners;
- Conducting discussions regarding what will be specific measurable accomplishments for the first year of the strategic plan;
- A facilitated process through which the priorities, strengths and weakness of regional and local plans are discussed and then an action plan for supporting those plans is developed in conjunction with the Locals and Regions;
- Exploration of performance metrics that would support the results the Board wants to achieve in the next three to five years; and
- Ongoing investment in sectors and career pathways including:

- Continued Board and board staff training on sectors strategies and career pathways;
- Continue efforts around of the development of a “talent supply chain management” data set with state and regional representation that would define and reevaluate sectoral demand and off-set that against supply side data to define any existing skills gap (occupationally) and then define or realign state targeted sector strategies to close any such gaps statewide.
- A data set such as this would provide an on-going supply chain management tool that would enable the board to better define priorities and measure performance over time.
- The continuation of the state data team and establishment of regional data teams building off the work already done to collect and disseminate regional data from a single, trusted source to Boards in the region and to gain economies of scale in supporting regional data needs.

Conclusion

The Illinois Workforce Innovation Board is well-positioned to meet the needs of the 21st century workforce and economy, provided it takes full advantage of its current energy and momentum. The Board should continue to explore best and promising practices and building its network of partners.

If the Board remains open to the opportunities made available through the implementation of WIOA, as well as their existing partnerships at the state, regional and local levels, it has the potential to significantly impact the state economy, regional economies and the quality of life for workers in Illinois.