

Supplemental Written Testimony submitted by Morton Bahr
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Representing the National Commission on Adult Literacy
via the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

Question posed by Rep. Ruben Hinojosa, Chairman, Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness of the House Committee on Education and Labor (ref. Feb. 18 letter from Rep. George Miller): How can the Workforce Investment Act partners work with the Community Colleges near them to use the newly designated economic recovery package funding for training programs?

Response: One-stop Career Centers, Workforce Investment Boards, businesses, unions, chambers, and other WIA partners can (1) *refer individuals* to be served by the “training and employment” provisions to community colleges for training, including adults at the lowest skills levels (2) work with the community colleges to *identify the training needs* of these individuals (including individual employability plans); (3) work with the colleges to *determine local labor market needs* (e.g., what local labor market occupations, existing or emerging, provide the greatest opportunities for employment) and develop suitable training programs for the relevant occupations for out-of-school adults (16 and older), and (4) *contract with community colleges* for the training required. Community colleges should also *initiate* partnerships and receive funds to develop them, not simply respond when approached by the WIBS and other partners.

The contracted programs of (4) should: (a) *Provide sequential adult education services* followed by transition to occupational training or postsecondary education. (b) *Customize job-skills training programs to include basic literacy and ESL instruction*, whether in classroom settings or via technology, and provide support services to improve both basic literacy and more advanced job skills. This will often require team-teaching by community college faculty and basic literacy/ESL faculty from the college and a variety of other service entities.¹ (c) *Integrate job training with counseling, job placement, and other support services* provided on campus or

¹ **An Example of Teamwork.** The goal of one community college in NYC is to improve literacy while improving job skills, and to integrate academic, social, and job placement skills. In one effort, it works with a nearby CBO-based literacy program to recruit adult students into a program that links basic literacy with construction training. The in-class portion integrates instruction in basic electrical wiring taught by community college faculty with reading and math instruction by the literacy teachers. A local union has helped shape the curriculum, and a local “green” entrepreneur gives instruction in how to wire solar panels. On-the-job instruction is offered under the auspices of the local union, and participants can use the resume-building support services of the on-campus WIB-sponsored One-Stop to locate jobs upon completion of the training. Participants are provided support with locating child-care, accessing social services, and financial literacy education by the local CBO. Participants who complete the first level of training are eligible for advanced training, which leads eventually to apprenticeship training with the union and an associate’s degree in construction management.

through arrangements with One-Stops and other appropriate organizations. (d) *Align job-skills training with career ladders* so that both skilled participants and low-skilled adults can move along pathways toward higher-level training and academic credit courses and credentials offered by community colleges. (e) Require that community colleges *include other service providers (of basic literacy skills and ESL) in the planning* and curriculum-building activities on an ongoing basis with local business, industry, and labor unions for a smooth transition from one point on the education continuum to readiness for job training and college. This includes but is not limited to family literacy programs, correctional education, ESL/immigrant groups, workforce alliances, and youth policy entities.

Discussion: The nation’s nearly 1,200 community colleges operate throughout America. Most already provide a wide range of training programs (e.g. associate degrees, career certificates, individual courses that are key to employability in certain fields, and short-term vocational programs). These highly versatile institutions usually focus their training programs on occupations for which they believe there is or will be a demand for workers in their local labor markets. Many already provide training programs for occupations in the healthcare sector (identified as a priority in the Recovery Package) and in emerging occupations (such as biotechnology), and they have experience and expertise to *quickly* develop training programs for new areas of employment, such as “green jobs.”

Many community colleges already provide basic skills training (basic literacy, high school equivalency programs, and/or English as a Second Language) or they partner with other local groups to provide these services. Providing services to low skilled adults in far greater numbers is essential to the success of the Recovery Package. As the work of the National Commission on Adult Literacy shows, without such services millions of individuals will be unable to enter or succeed in training programs that will increase their prospects for jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. Many specialized programs that offer adult basic education and vocational instruction are available to help guide the effort. Moreover, the Package gives priority to participants described in WIA Section 134(d)(4)(E) – welfare recipients and other low-income individuals needing intensive education and training.

Community colleges know *how* to meld adult education with occupational training and are uniquely qualified to provide seamless “career pathways” instruction that make it possible for all individuals – including those with low basic skills – to benefit from job training, and to receive

both occupational and other certifications (such as high school equivalency certificates) that will improve and attest to their employability.

In the past, WIA Title I (and Title II) workforce partners have made limited use of community colleges to provide the “career pathways” instruction that so many unemployed adults and youth require. In fact, WIA has not provided much occupational training of any kind to low-income, low-skilled adults. Research indicates two reasons for this: One is that career pathways instruction is often expensive and neither colleges nor WIA can provide it on a large scale from existing revenue streams. The other is that accountability measures [e.g., WIA Section 136(b)(A)(i)] emphasize rapid job placement rather than training which usually takes a longer period of time – especially for individuals with limited basic skills. In fact, success in basic skills (adult education) as a pre-requisite for training is not specified as a performance measure for adults at all; it should be, and is called for by the National Commission.

The availability of Recovery Act funding may be helpful in overcoming the first problem. But Congress and/or the Department of Labor may wish to clarify that, for purposes of training funds authorized by the Recovery Package, states and local One-Stops may use the same accountability standards for all adult programs that they use for the youngest youth cohort in programs under Sec. 136(b)(A)(ii). These include the attainment of basic skills and work readiness skills, attainment of secondary school diplomas or their equivalent, and placement and retention in postsecondary education or advanced training.

The WIA system as a whole will be under immense pressure to spend Recovery Package funding quickly and efficiently. The nature of the educational challenge makes the tight expenditure timeline of the Recovery Package especially problematic. If all funds must be spent by the end of FY 2010, it will be difficult for colleges and other training providers to develop and implement quality training programs, with measurable outcomes, for new occupational areas (such as “green jobs”) and to move individuals with low basic skills to program completion. Congress and/or the Department of Labor may wish to clarify that funds “obligated” for career pathways by the end of FY 2010 may be carried forward if they are used to help individuals enrolled in pathway programs complete their education and training, including adult basic education.

The National Commission on Adult Literacy has recommended that the adult education programs of WIA Titles I ² and II should be substantially revised and connected to attain both workforce preparation and other important national goals. It calls for the creation of a National Adult Education and Workforce Skills System that will require collaboration of Title I and Title II agencies, as well as other federal stakeholders (such as TANF agencies and programs in other federal agencies), the business community, and state and local government to produce and implement plans for the seamless transition of low-skilled, disadvantaged adults and youth to greater economic and social opportunities. The Commission calls on Congress to enact a comprehensive new Adult Education and Economic Growth Act as part of WIA reauthorization to attain this goal. Congressman Hinojosa and other members of Congress have expressed interest in such an Act and are drafting new legislation that aims to achieve it and its goals.

² The reference is to the four adult education programs of the Department of Labor identified by the Commission: the WIA Title I adult education program, dislocated worker program, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and out-of-school youth program.