

## Section I. Context, Vision, and Strategy

### Economic and Labor Market Context

#### **Question I: Provide a detailed analysis of the local area's economy, the labor pool, and the labor market context.**

In responding to this question, the local area should update its analysis to indicate how the economic downturn has impacted the local area's economy and the labor market context. This analysis should include current and anticipated impacts on employment by sector, current and projected demographics of the available labor pool including income levels as appropriate, and describe any skills gaps the local area faces, based on the skills held by current and expected dislocated workers and the skills demanded by industries and occupations expected to grow through economic recovery.

#### **Response:**

Like many other areas throughout the United States, LWA 12 has been severely impacted by the current recession; The local unemployment rate is traditionally higher than that of both the state and the country, and as of April, 2009, the unemployment rate was 10.2%, compared to 9.4% for the state and 8.9% nationally. In the pre-economic downturn period, the region saw its unemployment rate drop to 6.6%, or 6,608 unemployed. That number however steadily increased to its peak in March 2009 at 11,450 unemployed (11.7%).

Prior to the economic downturn the local area had experienced growth in most sectors, including manufacturing, transportation, and health care. The current economy has resulted in all private industry sectors being impacted by the economic downturn. While it appears private sector industry employment continues to decline, it is apparent the hardest hit industry will be construction and professional and business services.

Aggravating the employment losses in the region are the impacts felt by the region's residents that commute out of the region to work. LWA 12 residents have been strongly impacted by employment loss in surrounding areas; particularly being hard hit by manufacturing, and construction industry job losses in surrounding counties. The only sector that seems to have been largely spared is agriculture.

The NCI Works board expects economic recovery to begin first in construction, followed by manufacturing. However, there remains concern that recovery related to employment growth will not truly begin until later months in 2010. This will heighten local needs to assist the region's unemployed labor force and assist in the identification of transferrable skills that will position them for occupational opportunities as industry employment begins to recover.

Without a current specific workforce development study or up-to-date labor market information, the projected impact of the economic downturn is largely based on empirical observations, not on statistical analysis.

## Local Vision and Priorities

### **Question II: What is the local vision for ensuring a continuum of education and training opportunities that support a skilled workforce?**

In responding to this question, the local area should review the state's vision for implementing the Recovery Act, and describe the new local vision since the economic downturn. The description should include the local vision for economic recovery, touching on the Act's principles and the view of how the Recovery Act funds can be integrated into transformational efforts to achieve an invigorated, more innovative public workforce system capable of helping enable future economic growth and advancing shared prosperity for all Americans.

#### **Response:**

Given the downturn in today's economy, LWA 12 recognizes the need to quickly adapt its approach to educating and training a qualified workforce in order to keep its existing businesses competitive. Workforce development must quickly adapt to the realities of the current economic situation, and also direct resources to provide for a skilled workforce that aligns with good paying employment opportunities expected to be available in the coming weeks, months, and years.

As stated in its 5-year plan modification, one of the NCI Works' Goals is to **Educate and Train a Workforce to Prepare Them for the Globally Competitive Marketplace**. NCI Works will assure that all employment and training services for adults and youth are integrated and streamlined as much as possible to prepare them for the changing workforce needs and challenges. Incumbent Worker Training will continue to be utilized as a tool for upgrading and/or enhancing the skills of current workers, enabling them to retain their jobs or advance to higher-skilled positions. In the current economy, "green jobs" have become the focus of workforce systems across the country. In LWA #12, workers and/or job seekers will be encouraged to pursue training that enables them to fill the demand not only for the traditional occupations in the targeted industries (i.e., manufacturing, healthcare, tourism and logistics), but also for the "green" jobs in any industry sector that put them on a career path to self-sufficiency.

NCI Works is also utilizing the additional funding under the Recovery Act to increase the number of youth, adults and dislocated workers who will receive training through traditional occupational training programs as well as some more non-traditional – at least in terms of what has been offered in recent years – training programs. A special task force of the board has been established to work with the Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship training, Illinois Valley Community College and a local employer to explore the possibility of setting up an apprenticeship program for Tool and Die Makers. The employer who is involved in this initiative has indicated that he expects to hire between 20 – 30 Tool and Die Makers in the next 1 – 2 years, so NCI Works sees this as an opportunity to hire emerging and transitional workers.

Although the intent of the Recovery Act Summer Youth Program is to place youth in short-term jobs, NCI Works intends to make this experience a true learning experience for its youth through special projects and matching interests of youth with job opportunities wherever possible. In addition, all youth will be provided with work readiness skills training to better prepare them for entering the workforce either at the end of the summer program or at some appropriate time in the future. One special project that exemplifies this strategy is a collaborative project with two local unions, Carpenter's Local 195 and Cement Masons Local 11. Older youth will learn how to fabricate certain items such as park benches, picnic tables and flower pots, and then in some cases placing these items in cement slabs. This idea is to

introduce them to careers in the trades, and possibly even give them a leg up should they pursue this career path at the end of the summer program.

In keeping with the intent of the Recovery Act itself, LWA 12 intends to expend 80% of its allocated funds in the first year. While a good-paying job in any sector will be welcomed in this current economy, the focus of training opportunities will be in the manufacturing, logistics, healthcare and information technology sectors, and green jobs in any sector. NCI Works believes this is in line with DoL's vision as described in TEGL 14-08 and 14-08, Change I.

**Question III: What is the local vision for ensuring that every youth has the opportunity for developing and achieving career goals through education and workforce training, including the youth most in need of assistance, such as out-of-school youth, homeless youth, youth in foster care, youth aging out of foster care, youth offenders, children of incarcerated parents, migrant and seasonal farmworker youth, youth with disabilities, and other youth at risk?**

In responding to this question, the local area should review the state and DOL/ETA's vision for implementing the Recovery Act to reconnect disconnected youth through multiple pathways to education and training that enable them to enter and advance in the workforce. The local area should describe its strategy for serving youth with funds from the Recovery Act, as well as how its strategies will be adjusted to respond to the economic downturn. What activities will the local area focus on (i.e., primarily focus on summer employment opportunities, the full range of WIA youth services, or a combination)? Describe how plans for the Recovery Act youth activities will complement the local area's overall vision for serving youth under WIA.

**Response:** LWA 12 has developed a youth program that focuses on ensuring that youth improve their labor market prospects and long-term career pathway. All 10 youth program elements are available through our formula funding so they may not all be supported through ARRA funding. We are providing as many youth as possible with summer employment opportunities, especially in 2009 as recommended by state and federal policy. This will include a work experience component that increases work readiness skills and provides a meaningful work experience that includes age appropriate activities. A leadership/work readiness conference is being provided to new customers to prepare them for work. This renewed summer employment program is being well-received in the local area, both by youth as well as employers such as local businesses, governmental agencies and schools.

As stated above, the initial effort targeting youth in LWA 12 is the summer program, with 75% - 80% of the funding dedicated to that program this first year. Throughout the four-county NCI Works area, various initiatives are providing opportunities to youth most in need. For example, because of the relief given to local areas under the Recovery Act to serve youth but including them only in the work readiness performance measure, LWA 12 is taking advantage of this flexibility to serve youth with significant barriers to employment who would not otherwise be able to meet the more rigid common measures. Another group of hard-to-serve youth, those who are in the juvenile justice system, will be part of a special collaborative project with the local youth service bureau. This "green" project will teach gardening, landscaping and horticulture to the youth, while enabling them to apply what they are learning at various public parks and other sites.

In addition to meeting low-income guidelines, youth served through the WIA program and under the Recovery Act programs, must also possess another barrier to getting or keeping a job. Recognizing that many of the youth served in WIA/ARRA programs enter the labor force with these barriers, which are not always present in non-eligible youth, the WIB approved criteria, both as the additional barrier and under the 5% window, that are designed to neutralize those disadvantages and allow us to serve a broader group of youth. This has helped in recruiting workers for the summer program. Particularly in

this economic downturn, youth, without the experience and work history of many unemployed/laid off adults, will face even greater challenges finding a job this summer. It is NCI Works' desire that all summer jobs will provide the young workers with the opportunities to "learn how to work", increase career awareness and develop at least a minimal work history to market to employers. Therefore, summer jobs that can serve as the gateway to career paths have been developed to familiarize youth with the work environment, employer expectations, educational and/or training requirements and both the positive and negative sides of a possible career choice, are the preferred sites for the summer program.

LWA 12 encourages the partnership of many agencies to best serve the youth of this area. The WIA IB provider works in conjunction with Carl Perkins grantees as well as the local Regional Offices of Education to provide career fairs, Work in the Real World conferences, and other programs for out of school youth as well as in school youth. We contract with service providers to develop and implement innovative service strategies to recruit new customers and better serve current customers. The ARRA funding will allow us to focus more formula funding on these providers.

Youth programs are further discussed in Question XIII.

**Question IV: Identify the key workforce investment system priorities for the local area's workforce investment system and how each will lead to achieving the local vision for workforce and economic development.**

In responding to this question, local areas should reflect on shifting priorities necessitated by the economic downturn and areas of focus for economic recovery. Local areas should identify the key workforce investment priorities for the use of the Recovery Act funds infused into the local area's workforce investment system and how each will lead to actualizing the new local vision.

**Response:**

**Increase the numbers of workers with post-secondary educational attainment.** Our plan is to allocate 80% of ARRA funds to training in both Adult and Dislocated Workers. This will not only allow for greater numbers of participants in Associate's Degree and Certificate programs, but through local waivers, may even allow greater financial assistance toward bachelors degrees. Also, through provision of Needs Related Payments we can help some of those Adult and Dislocated Worker participants who might not otherwise financially be able to attend training to do so.

**Address the challenge of the aging workforce.** NCI Works has recognized that local firms, especially in the manufacturing sector have workforces that are nearing retirement. One challenge for firms is to be able to replace workers as they retire. It's not as simple as just hiring a replacement, however as years of experience and skills must also be replaced. Through increased use of incumbent worker training and On-the-Job Training, we can assist employers in closing the skills gap of the new hires.

**Support Growth and Innovation in Green Jobs.** As this is an emerging emphasis both statewide and nationally, it will be important to keep abreast of new ideas and information coming from both DCEO and DOL and make this available to employers and workers. One way is the Green Jobs conference (explained in Q. 5), as well as through the Private Sector Employer committee.

As there are very few training programs available in green technologies, we will use Incumbent Worker Training funds, as well as OJT funds to support employer-based training in green technologies, regardless of the industry sector.

The Board will work with employers and local training providers to explore enhancements to existing curricula and development of new curricula in green technologies.

### **Overarching Local Strategies**

**Question V: What strategies are in place to address the state's strategic direction, the local priorities, and the workforce development issues identified through the analysis of the local area's economy and labor market?**

The response to this question should describe the local area's key, actionable strategies it is deploying to achieve the local vision for the use of the Recovery Act and regular formula funds. The state is interested in how the local area is connecting and integrating recovery activities to ongoing workforce investments.

- How workforce investment system resources, both stimulus and regular formula funds, can be deployed to serve increased numbers of workers in need.
- How adults and dislocated workers, including low-income adults, who need to acquire new skills will have increased access to education and training opportunities.
- How the local area will address a dual-customer approach, meeting the skill needs of existing and emerging employers and high-growth occupations as well as the needs of under-skilled adults.
- How workforce activities (e.g., adult education, job training, postsecondary education, registered apprenticeship, career advancement, needs related payments, and supportive service activities) will be aligned in career pathways both now in implementing the Recovery Act and in the transformed workforce system of the future.
- How the local area will partner to develop workforce solutions with community colleges, business and labor organizations, registered apprenticeship program sponsors, civic groups, and community organizations to align workforce development with strategies for regional development and shared prosperity.

### **Responses:**

Some of the goals from the Draft State Plan include:

#### **Prevent dislocation:**

Increased funding for training will allow LWA 12 to invest even more in incumbent worker training to support local firms who are retraining workers to remain more competitive . Both IWT and On-the-Job training can help employers fill critical shortages in skilled positions.

**Address short-term needs and shortages:**

These can be addressed by the increased funding in all types of training. Since 80% of ARRA funds will be allocated to training, we will be able to fully utilize Incumbent Worker Training, OJT, and class-size training to address these short-term needs.

**Position the state for post-recovery growth in key sectors by accelerating investment in the skills of Illinois workers:**

Many of the jobs that exist today in growing sectors, and that will exist in the future, will require post-secondary training. Through increased numbers of Adult and Dislocated Workers in training, we can help to address the low educational attainment of the local workforce, and position them to be able to participate in the economy of the future, as well as to provide firms with a workforce that not only has a strong work ethic, but is skilled.

Even prior to the passage of ARRA, LWA 12 has been exploring ways to implement registered apprenticeship programs. We are currently working with the community college, the unions, and local employers on this initiative. One project is described in the response to Question VI

The summer youth program will give hundreds of youth a positive work experience, a chance to improve their “soft skills”, and a chance to encourage them to pursue higher education.

**Coordination:**

NCI Works is co-sponsoring a panel discussion that includes representatives from IDOT, DCEO, North Central Illinois Council of Governments, Upper Illinois River Valley Development Authority, and the Business Employment Skills team to discuss local programs and initiatives funded by ARRA.

**Service Delivery Strategies, Support for Training**

**Question VI: Describe innovative service delivery strategies the local area has or is planning to undertake to maximize resources, increase service levels, improve service quality, achieve better integration or meet other key local goals.**

In answering this question, the local area should describe innovative local strategies to accomplish the local vision and achieve the goals of the Recovery Act, including how the local area will:

- Increase services to workers in need.
- Support the full range of Illinois workNet™ Center customers in acquiring the skills needed to attain jobs in high-growth, high-wage industries and occupations, including such supports as needs related payments, basic skills remediation, English as a second language, and supportive services.
- Ensure education and training delivered through the workforce system results in education and workforce skills of demonstrated value, and focus assessments and certifications towards the next level of education and employment.
- Strategically use youth, dislocated worker and adult funds to quickly deliver innovative services.

- Provide targeted work experiences in order to prepare individuals for job opportunities in new industries or occupations, particularly using registered apprenticeship and on-the-job training for all jobseekers, and summer work experience for youth.
- Align workforce activities with education strategies and economic and community development strategies to meet skill needs of jobs and industries important to the local and regional economies and meet the needs of under-skilled adults.

**Response:**

LWA 12 intends to use Recovery Act funding to increase the number of clients served and for training and supportive services that complement training opportunities for clients in need. The local workforce system understands that the vast majority of Recovery Act funding should be targeted for client services and in particular direct training. Short-term training such as On-the-job Training will be utilized as much as possible to meet the needs of both employers and job seekers. Currently LWA 12 is working with the Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training to explore the idea of establishing an apprenticeship program for Tool and Die Makers. This is in direct response to an employer who expressed both a current and future need for as many as 25 – 30 Tool and Die Makers.

Although there is an emphasis on green jobs in the Recovery Act, there are very few training opportunities available in the NCI Works' area. In order to address this shortage, the LWIB intends to sponsor a green jobs conference that would accomplish several goals. First of all, it would define and identify green jobs in the local area. Second, it would provide employers with information on how to create or develop green jobs within their existing businesses, or present entrepreneurial ideas for green jobs in new business ventures. Both options would contribute to improving the workforce either by increasing the number of jobs available, or by creating jobs that would take a current worker to the next level of his or her potential. Third, it would provide training institutions with information on the type of training needed to meet employer demand, as well as the level of consumer interest for specific accredited programs. Since nothing like this has been done to date, NCI Works views this as an innovative opportunity to step up its role as leader in workforce development in the four-county area.

The downturn in the economy has left higher numbers of people without jobs than in recent years in LWA 12, while the number of jobs in the area has diminished significantly making it even harder for individuals to become employed or re-employed once they are out of work. As a result, many unemployed and laid-off workers will choose to enroll in training programs either to upgrade their skills or to learn new ones. NCI Works intends to assist these people with the usual financial assistance in terms of tuition, books and supportive services. However, the Recovery Act allows areas to expand their services and offer Needs Related Payments to individuals while in training. LWA 12 has developed a policy for NRPs and will make them available accordingly.

Considering the short-term of Recovery Act funds, we intend to provide as much impact in the summer of 2009 as possible. We are looking into innovative strategies as well such as registered apprenticeships, developing youth projects with local union groups as well the Department of Natural Resources. Examples of these innovative strategies are addressed elsewhere in this plan.

For years there has been an active working relationship between the local workforce system, the education community and economic development. Chambers/economic development agencies and the high school and post-school communities are often co-sponsors of NCI Works events and activities. Because all parties have the same goal of developing a qualified workforce to meet the demands of

current and future local employers, this level of cooperation and this alignment of strategies will continue under the Recovery Act.

## **Section II. Service Delivery**

### **Governance and Collaboration**

**Question VII: Describe how local agencies involved in the workforce investment system intend to interrelate on workforce, economic development, and education issues to improve alignment of Recovery Act.**

In responding to this question, the local areas should describe how the CEOs, LWIB and Title IB Administrator are ensuring cross agency collaboration so that workforce investments are fully tied to other investments funded by the Recovery Act outside of workforce development

#### **Response:**

The CEOs, LWIB and Title IB Administrator in LWA 12 all fully endorse collaboration among agencies under the Recovery Act. In order to make the public aware of projects and initiatives going on in the area, NCI Works and the North Central Illinois Logistics Council (NCILC) are co-sponsoring a Recovery Panel discussion. Members of the panel include representatives from DCEO Bureau of Energy and Recycling (public energy initiatives), Ameren IP (business initiatives), Illinois Department of Transportation (highway and roads projects), North Central Illinois Council of Governments (economic development/municipal infrastructure projects), Upper Illinois River Valley Development Association (Recovery Zone bonds) and the Title IB Administrator (workforce initiatives). A second panel discussion is being planned with LWA 4 to cover the northwest region of our area.

In terms of the LWIB, the Chair person of NCI Works has asked that the partner agencies give an update on their respective Recovery Act activities, initiatives, projects, etc. Similar discussions have been taking place at the One-Stop Partner Committee meetings, but have been expanded to include sharing opportunities for referral and collaboration between agencies. Committee reports will then be provided at the next full Board meeting.

**Question VIII: Describe the steps the local areas will take to improve operational collaboration of the workforce investment activities and other related activities and programs at the local level (e.g., joint activities, memoranda of understanding, coordinated policies, etc.). How will local agencies eliminate any existing local-level barriers to coordination?**

In responding to this question, local areas should describe how local collaboration will be supported and sustained.

#### **Response:**

NCI Works believes the partner agencies in LWA 12 have always worked well together in the past and has no reason to believe relationships will change under the Recovery Act. However, as stated in the previous question, updates on Recovery Act activities from the local partners and reports from the One-Stop Partner Committee will be a standing agenda item at all board meetings for the duration of the ARRA. NCI Works will use this opportunity to address any obstacles to continued cooperation between partner agencies if necessary.

## Adult and Dislocated Worker Services

### **Question IX: Describe local strategies and policies to ensure adults and dislocated workers have universal access to the minimum required core services as described in §134(d)(2).**

In its response, the local area should address core services for adults, dislocated workers, and target populations, especially those given preference in the WIA Adult program in the Recovery Act - recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals.

#### **Response:**

LWA 12 provides the following types of core and intensive services to adults and dislocated workers, delivered through the One-Stop and satellites, state agency partners, a broad range of community partners and via the Illinois workNet portal ([www.illinoisworknet.com](http://www.illinoisworknet.com)):

- Job Search Skills Training
- Job Search Assistance
- Job/Career Counseling/Employability Skills Training
- Resource Room/Internet Access
- Resume Workshops
- Local Labor Market Information
- Interviewing Skills Training
- Job Fairs
- Placement Assistance
- Other Core Services

Resource rooms are provided with access to labor market information, job search tools, and other web-based resources are provided through the Illinois workNet portal. Staff members have completed the Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Online Course to assure a consistent quality of information.

LWA 12 has a business service team (BSTs) to ensure local businesses have easy access to all Illinois workNet Center services. Our team includes representatives from the BEST, Inc., the IVCC Dislocated Worker Center, IVCC Business Center, IL Department of Employment Security and the IL Department of Rehabilitation Services. Services include: coordinated employer outreach, basic labor exchanges services, customized applicant recruitment, employment and training services (e.g., on-the-job and customized training), job fairs, labor market information, and workshops on issues such as ADA compliance, Unemployment Insurance, OSHA requirements, and tax credits. The Illinois workNet portal and program offer BSTs Certified Illinois workNet Business Advisor Online Training and a set of value-added services they can offer employers. These services include: No cost job postings to the Illinois workNet CareerBuilder Key Sector Job Board, business branding pages used to educate the public on key sectors and related jobs, marketing materials, and training and access to post business information to the portal.

### **Question X: Describe how the local area will integrate resources provided under the Wagner-Peyser Act and WIA Title I for adults and dislocated workers, as well as resources provided by required Illinois workNet partner programs, to deliver core services.**

In its response, the local area should address how it will integrate resources provided under the Recovery Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and WIA Title I for adults and dislocated workers, as well as resources provided by required Illinois workNet partner programs. For example, how will the local area use these

resources to provide significant funding for low-income and low-skilled workers that help them access the services and training needed to pursue family-supporting jobs.

**Response:**

A well-trained and adequately prepared workforce will result if quality services are provided to employers, job seekers and current workers. Life-long learning is a key aspect in providing opportunities for upgrading skills of current workers, educating and re-educating job seekers, emerging and transitional workers, and being responsive to the ever-changing needs of employers. North Central Illinois Works is committed to ensuring that the adults and youth served by the local one-stop delivery system are afforded every opportunity to access the matrix of services available within LWA 12.

WIA Title I providers and the Illinois Department of Employment Security are co-located in the One-Stop Center and part-time in other satellite offices. This allows services and resources to be fully integrated for the benefit of all customers.

Developing and maintaining the technological needs of the one-stop system is a shared responsibility of the partners in LWA 12. On an as-needed basis, infrastructure is purchased and/or upgraded to ensure all customers who visit the One-Stop are afforded the latest technology funding can provide.

As required by law and state policy, at least 51% of LWIA 12 customers are low-income adults or welfare recipients. Usually, the percentage is significantly higher than that, largely due to our targeted recruiting efforts. Preference to targeted populations usually only becomes an issue when sufficient funds are not available to serve all appropriate customers. The ARRA has afforded us the opportunity to serve a much larger number of applicants than in the past.

**Question XI: Describe the local vision for increasing training access and opportunities for individuals including the investment of WIA Title I funds and the leveraging of other funds and resources.**

In its response, the local area should describe how they will increase training access and opportunities for individuals, including the investment of WIA Title I funds and Recovery Act funds, and the leveraging of other funds and resources. How will the local area use contracts with institutions of higher education and other training providers to maximize funds to the greatest benefit?

**Response:**

ARRA funds will allow LWIA12 to increase the number of participants in all training programs. Additional training options as well as providers are being considered. In addition, local community colleges are meeting to ascertain the feasibility of class-size training contracts.

The current high unemployment rate should increase the numbers of applicants seeking training and upgrading of skills. The increase in MAP, PELL and other financial aid, combined with increased WIA funding will make educational costs more manageable for low-income and low-skilled workers.

**Question XII: What models/templates/approaches does the local area utilize for service delivery in the local Illinois workNet Centers? For example, do all local Illinois workNet Centers have a uniform method of organizing their service delivery to business customers? Is there a common individual assessment process utilized in all local Illinois workNet Centers?**

In its response, the local area should describe its models/templates/approaches for service delivery in the local Illinois workNet Centers, particularly whether the local area is adjusting its approach to deliver increased levels of services with funds received under the Recovery Act.

- Do all local Illinois workNet Centers have a uniform method of organizing their service delivery to business customers?
- Is there a common individual assessment process utilized in all local Illinois workNet Centers?
- What approaches will be used to ensure funds are targeted to those most in need, including low-income, public assistance recipients, persons with disabilities, etc.?
- How will local areas streamline the sequence of service to facilitate individual access to needed services and training?

**Response:**

NCI Works does not condone a cookie-cutter or ‘one size fits all’ approach to service delivery. Therefore, describing a uniform service delivery model is not possible for this area. The process of individual assessment is standard to a degree as the forms, eligibility determination and record keeping requirements are prescribed by law or policy.

Services and program participation is then determined by our trained, professional career advisors in conjunction with customer needs and choices. Procedure manuals have been developed to provide some uniformity in the provision of services and completion of records.

The initial business contact is similar for all businesses, but the services needed and delivered are tailored specifically to meet each business’ needs. Likewise, input sought from businesses regarding employment and training needs is uniform, but the dialogue often generates assorted other labor market and economic information.

**Youth Services**

**Question XIII: Describe the local area's strategy for providing comprehensive, integrated services to eligible youth, including those most in need.**

In responding to this question, the local area should include the following:

- Describe the anticipated program design for the WIA Youth funds provided under the Recovery Act and State policy. Include in this description a program design for both younger, in-school, and older or out-of-school youth (including the 22-24 year olds that can be served with Recovery Act funds).
- The State strongly encourages local areas to expend the maximum amount of Recovery Act funds possible for summer youth in the summer of 2009. Will the local area use the Recovery Act funds to fund only a 2009 summer youth program or some combination of 2009 and 2010? If using the funds over two summers, what percentage of funds does the local area anticipate using for the first summer?

- If using the funds for summer employment opportunities, describe how the local area will deliver summer youth employment opportunities. Will the local area operate the program or allocate the funds?
- Describe the types of work sites that will be developed for summer employment, including a mix of public and private sector work experiences, and how the local area will ensure that meaningful work experiences will be developed.
- Describe the local area's policy for developing the mix of classroom versus worksite time in a summer employment opportunity. Describe the local area's policy for determining that summer employment opportunities are connected to academic and/or occupational learning and the types of connections that will be utilized.
- Describe how the local area will implement activities that support out-of-school youth during summer and/or non-summer months, such as supportive services.
- Provide the anticipated number of youth to be served with Recovery Act funds, including the anticipated number of summer employment opportunities created with Recovery Act funds.
- Describe if the local area will take advantage of the flexibility provided in the Recovery Act to alter program design in serving youth with Recovery Act funds who participate in summer employment only. Local areas have the flexibility to determine: 1) which of the 10 program elements will be provided with Recovery Act funds; 2) if the 12 month follow-up will be required for youth served with Recovery Act funds during the summer months only; 3) the type of Individual Service Strategy (ISS) for youth served with Recovery Act funds during the summer months only; and 4) whether it is appropriate that academic learning be directly linked to summer employment for each youth served with Recovery Act funds during the summer months only.

**Response:**

Currently, a wide mix of services is provided to low-income youth to help prepare them for projected job openings in the area. Youth who have a high school diploma or GED are assisted with post-high school expenses through a number of financial sources such as WIA, PELL Grants, MAP Grants, and the Office of Rehabilitation Services. They are also encouraged to visit the local One-Stop or satellite to take advantage of the numerous publications and software programs which provide information on the labor market, job openings, job seeking techniques, etc. including those offered through IL workNet.

The needs of youth dropouts are examined and appropriate referrals are made to alternative schools, community college adult learning centers, Job Corps, Illinois Department of Employment Security, BEST, Inc., and any other agency that provides educational and employment assistance. As already noted, the educational and technical requirements for employment in the area is increasing; therefore, every effort is made to encourage young dropouts to return to school in order to obtain their high school diploma. Counseling is also provided to assist them in making informed decisions regarding additional education and training which they will need to advance along their chosen career paths.

Since the implementation of WIA, youth who possess characteristics that present additional challenges to employment (e.g., basic skills deficient, school dropout, homeless, runaway, foster child, offender, pregnant/parenting teen, etc.) are now served by a partnering service system. Although most agencies

and institutions do an outstanding job of providing their specialized services to their targeted population, through WIA, contracts have allowed the expertise of agencies/organizations to flourish. These will be provided through formula funding.

ARRA funding will be concentrated on the 2009 summer program, as outlined in TEGL 14-08, “conferees are particularly interested in these funds being used to create summer employment opportunities for youth.” Any funds remaining after the summer program will be used to create year round opportunities for those youth deemed appropriate and in need of additional services, and a second summer program, on a smaller scale.

Plans are to spend 75 – 80% of ARRA youth program funds on the 2009 summer program. Over 300 youth should be served in work experiences with the combined ARRA and formula youth funding. BEST, Inc. is operating the summer youth employment program because the organization has 25 years of experience operating work experience programs, with some staff having even more years of experience.

In-school and out-of-school youth who are interested in being selected for participation in the BEST, Inc. Summer Youth program may be invited to participate in the Dale Broadway Leadership Conference (DBLC), a two day orientation training session that covers a wide spectrum of topics. In addition to simply introducing the youth to the summer work program, the curriculum is designed to provide work readiness/preparation instruction (resumes, applications, career exploration, etc.), convey employer expectations in the workplace, and teach interpersonal and life skills that may be used on or off the job. For the 2009 Summer Program, the work readiness component will be done through Illinois workNet. In addition, and as part of their more active role in the hiring process, the employers will also be instrumental in the developments of the training outline identifying the specific tasks the youth will be expected to do while on the job. These occupational skills along with the work readiness skills will be monitored by staff as outlined in Policy Letter 08-ARRA-01, Change 1. Furthermore, successful attainment of the Work Readiness performance standard will be determined according to the aforementioned policy letter. Successful completion of the DBLC orientation will be rewarded with a certificate and an incentive of \$30.00 per day for successful completion.

A mix of public and private sector worksites will be utilized. The majority of worksites will be public (i.e. schools, state parks, governmental entities, etc.) as they have a history of providing meaningful work experiences for these eligible young people, particularly the younger youth in need of more supervision. It provides these young people with the soft skills they will need to be successful in the world of work, along with exposure to career exploration. It has the added bonus of providing public agencies with additional help they could not otherwise afford. Some private worksites have been developed, mainly for older youth, that will either potentially lead to an unsubsidized job in a career of interest to the youth, or the job is in the career area of the student’s area of study. All work experiences are linked to training plans to learn and demonstrate specific skills.

Special projects that are being developed will include occupational and possibly some academic learning. These include a project with the construction and cement workers unions in LaSalle County, a community landscaping project in LaSalle County, a community maintenance/beautification project in Lee County, and projects with the IL Department of Natural Resources in all LWA 12 counties. All of

these work experiences will either be or contain components of green jobs. All youth will be provided with information on green jobs in the form of flyers with their paychecks.

Individual Service Strategies (ISS) will be developed for summer youth based on interests, past work experience, goals, education, and barriers. Followup will be done on youth that require it, determined by their ISS.

### **Veterans' Priority of Service**

**Question XIV: What policies and strategies does the local area have in place to ensure that, pursuant to the Jobs for Veterans Act (P.L.107-288) (38 use 4215), priority of service is provided to veterans (and certain spouses) who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements for all employment and training programs funded by the Department of Labor?**

In answering this question, the local area should outline the changes to local policies and strategies that make them sufficient to meet the requirements of 20 CFR 1010.230, published at 73 Fed. Reg. 78132 on December 19, 2008, of the Jobs for Veterans Act regulations issued on December 19, 2008 implementing priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses in Department of Labor job training programs. This includes providing the following information and/or attachments to the local plan modification:

A description of the changes to policies for the delivery of priority of service by the Local Workforce Investment Board and Illinois workNet Center(s) for all qualified job training programs delivered through the local workforce system. The description must include how:

1. The local policies ensure that covered persons are identified at the point of entry and given an opportunity to take full advantage of priority of service.
  2. The local policies ensure that covered persons are aware of:
    - a. Their entitlement to priority of service;
    - b. The full array of employment, training, and placement services available under priority of service; and
    - c. Any applicable eligibility requirements for those programs and/or services.
- Provide a copy of the local policy to implement priority of service for the local Illinois workNet Centers and for service delivery by local workforce preparation and training providers.

### **Response:**

Regarding services to Veterans, all partner agencies agree **to the following:**

#### **Key Definitions**

- *Covered person* - The regulations adopt and apply this statutory term, which includes *eligible spouses*, as defined by the statute, and *veteran*, as defined by the regulations.
- *Veteran* - The regulations specify that the definition for *veteran* specified at 38 U.S.c. 101(2) applies across all qualified job training programs for the purpose of priority of service. That definition includes two key criteria:
  - Service in the active military, naval, or air service; and,
  - Discharge under conditions other than dishonorable.

- *Eligible spouse* - For Veterans Priority of Service an eligible spouse is/was married to a veteran who:
  - Dies of a service-connected disability or died while a total service connected disability per VA evaluation was in existence;
  - Service member is missing in action, captured or forcibly detained by a foreign power for more than 90 days; or,
  - Veteran has total service-connected disability, per VA evaluation.
- A) All partners who are recipients of funds for qualified job training programs will
  - identify covered persons at the *point of entry* to programs and/or services so they can take full advantage of priority of service. Point of entry includes physical locations, such as IL workNet Centers, as well as web sites and other virtual service delivery resources, including Illinois Skills Match and IL workNet.
  - implement policies to ensure that covered persons are aware of:
    - Their entitlement to priority of service;
    - The full array of programs and services available to them; and,
    - Any applicable eligibility requirements for those programs and/or services.
- B) All partners agree to the following in terms of implementing Priority of Service:
  - Priority of service means the right of eligible covered persons to take precedence over eligible non-covered persons in obtaining services, and that “taking precedence” may mean:
    - The covered person receives access to the service or resource earlier in time than the non-covered person; or
    - If the service or resource is limited, the covered person receives access to the service or resource instead of or before the non-covered person.
  - Priority of service may be applied across three different types of qualified job training programs:
    - Universal access programs that do not target specific groups;
    - Discretionary targeting programs that focus on certain groups but are not mandated to serve target group members before other eligible individuals; and,
    - Statutory targeting programs that are mandated by federal law to provide priority or preference to certain groups.

Furthermore:

- ~~A). Staff identify Veterans status as part of the initial process for assessing customer needs and services, as well as referral to another partner agency.~~
  - C) The Business Services Team includes Hire Veteran’s First and Veteran’s Priority in their presentations to Employers.
  - D) Illinois Skills Match automatically gives preference to Veterans when matching job orders.
1. Complete the WIA Program Services to Special Populations form included in Attachment A of this letter. The planned service levels shown on this form are not meant to be strictly enforced on the basis of low incidences. They are meant to provide background for the performance measure negotiation process, as well as an indication of program choices regarding services to special populations.
  2. WIA adult funds are generally considered to be limited as that term is used in Section 134 of the Act. Therefore, WIA title I adult grant funds budgeted for intensive and training services must be provided on a priority basis to TANF or other low-income individuals who do not otherwise have access to these services through other funding sources. Discuss and quantify how the area

will comply with this requirement as part of the submission of the local plan. Compliance with this requirement may be demonstrated by the local area in one of two ways; either 51% or more of the participants served are from the target population; or 51% or more of the adult funds budgeted for intensive and training services are expended on the target population. The local area may request a waiver to the targeting requirement to the extent that empirical evidence is presented that demonstrates that, due the availability of sufficient alternative funds or insufficient demand from the priority population, the needs of the low-income population can be adequately met without targeting. The waiver may be requested as part of the local plan submission or at a later date. Indicate if a waiver is being requested. If so, provide the empirical evidence required to support the waiver request.

**Response:**

LWA 12 has opted to comply with the priority requirement based on individuals enrolled in rather than on dollars spent. At this time, a waiver to this targeting requirement is not being requested.

**Service Delivery to Targeted Populations**

**Question XV: Describe the local area's strategies to ensure that the full range of employment and training programs and services delivered through the Illinois workNet delivery system are accessible to and will meet the needs of dislocated workers, displaced homemakers, low-income individuals, migrant and seasonal farm workers, women, minorities, individuals training for nontraditional employment, veterans, public assistance recipients and individuals with multiple barriers to employment (including older individuals, limited English proficiency individuals, and people with disabilities).**

In responding to this question, the local area should:

- Describe the strategy the local area will use to effectively implement the Recovery Act priority of service for low-income individuals and recipients of public assistance under the WIA Adult program.

**Response:**

Services to special populations has been previously addressed. While Title IB service providers in LWA12 offer universal services to the general public, recruitment, service delivery, and partner linkages are focused on the populations we were mandated to serve

**Section III. Operations**

**Transparency and Public Comment**

**Question XVI: Include a description of the process the local area used to make the Plan available to the public and the outcome of the local area's review of the resulting public comments.**

The Recovery Act places a high priority on transparency. The local area should describe:

- Local efforts to promote transparency.
- The process used to make the plan modification available to the public and the outcome of the local area's review of resulting public comments.

**Response:**

The Recovery Act plan for LWA 12 was presented to and approved by the Planning/Organizational Resources Committee acting on behalf of NCI Works at their meeting on June 17, 2009. Their action will be ratified at the July NCI Works meeting. Representatives of the business community, labor, education, vocational rehabilitation agencies, welfare agencies and community-based organizations serve on the local workforce investment board and were asked to provide input and comments on the plan as presented. The plan was presented to the Chief Elected Officials at their June 15, 2009 meeting. At that time they unanimously voted to allow the BEST, Inc. Executive Director to act on their behalf at the Planning/Organizational Resources Committee Meeting in order to get the modification submitted by the June 30, 2009 due date. This action will be ratified by the CEOs at their August 2009 meeting, and any revisions, additions, etc. will be addressed at that time. This NCI Works Recovery Act plan is being submitted with the expressed understanding that the document is a work in progress and that future meetings will focus on more thoroughly analyzing the workforce development system in LWA 12.

Furthermore, a legal notice was placed in all major newspapers throughout LWA 12 following policy procedures. This legal notice informed the general public and any interested parties that the ARRAPlan would be available for comment in the BEST, Inc. administrative office and the Dislocated Worker Center office at Illinois Valley Community College.

In terms of transparency, the Accountability Committee of NCI Works reviews progress on programs and overall Board goals on a regular basis. The Business Liaison and Marketing Committee of NCI Works intends to distribute press releases and public service announcements on the results and accomplishments of ARRA activities, especially of the summer youth program. CEOs receive regular reports and updates on “regular” WIA activities, and will receive the same for ARRA activities. NCI Works publishes an annual workforce report which includes information on WIA activities and accomplishments and will include information on ARRA activities and accomplishments for the duration of the program. Finally, each August the Executive Director of BEST, Inc. appears before the four county boards to talk about the achievements and accomplishments of the local workforce system. Again, for the duration of the program, information on ARRA will be shared in this public forum as well.

**Increasing: Services for Universal Access**

**Question XVII: What local policies are in place to promote universal access and consistency of service?**

In its response, the local area should explain how it will efficiently and effectively use Recovery Act funds to support the hiring of sufficient levels of staff in the limited time period available for local Illinois workNet Centers to provide universal access and services required to meet the needs of increased numbers of customers in the economic downturn.

**Response:** LWA 12 intends to spend approximately 80% of its Recovery Act funding on direct training for customers. To date, one additional part-time position has been added to assist with Dislocated Worker activities, and 3 full-time staff were added to assist with summer program activities. One of these positions may be moved to assisting with the adult program when the summer program begins to wind down. Looking down the road, the LWA may hire an additional staff person to be responsible for increasing the use of Illinois workNet by customers, and to increase the overall utilization of IwN within the four-county area. Staff who worked on the summer program were seasoned veterans of previous summer programs and were immediately effective in terms of implementation.

The NCI Works Business Service Team has been operating in LWA 12 almost since the inception of WIA, and therefore already has an established relationship with many of the local employers.

## **Procurement**

**Question XVIII: Describe the competitive and non-competitive processes that will be used at the local level to award grants and contracts for activities under title I of WIA, including how potential bidders are being made aware of the availability of grants and contracts. (Note: All procurements must comply with OMS requirements codified in 29 CFR Parts 95.4095.48 and 97.36.)**

In answering this question, the local area should describe:

- How providers of all youth services will be procured under the Recovery Act. If using funds for summer employment opportunities and the fiscal agent is not operating this program element, please specifically describe procedures for procuring summer employment operational entities and job opportunities.
- How the local area will implement the Recovery Act provision that a Local Workforce Investment Board may award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible training provider if the local board determines that it would facilitate the training of multiple individuals in high-demand occupations, and if such a contract does not limit customer choice.

### **Response:**

LWA12 does not plan to procure providers for youth services with ARRA funds. The procedure for procuring youth services with formula funds is described in the Youth Plan.

If NCI Works determines that it would facilitate the training of multiple individuals in high-demand occupations to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible training provider, a competitive process similar to the procurement for youth providers as described in the Youth Plan would be used.

## **Monitoring and Oversight**

**Question XIX: Describe the monitoring and oversight criteria and procedures the local area utilizes to move the system toward the local area's vision and achieve the goals identified above.**

In responding to this question, the local area should demonstrate, through a monitoring plan or otherwise, that the local area's plan includes monitoring and oversight of the additional funds provided under the Recovery Act, particularly plans to monitor reemployment services and summer employment, including summer employment worksites.

**Response:**

At a minimum, LWA 12 will utilize similar procedures for monitoring and oversight of Recovery Funds as it does with WIA formula funds. Worksites will be monitored for compliance with statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements. Worksite monitoring tools are in the process of being developed in alignment with requirements outlined in WIA Policy Letter No. 08-ARRA-01, Change 1.