2015 Adult Education Project: Working Group: Resources – second meeting

June 29, 2015

**Present:** Jill Holloway (facilitator), Diana Perdomo (note-taker),

Mary Parella (Pawtucket Adult Ed Program), Kristen McKenna (GWB),

Tom Larrabee (Progreso Latino), Melanie LaMountain (Westbay CAP), Pat Bellart (RIRAL)

**Notes:**

**Discussion**

Participants at this meeting discussed the importance of placing the focus of the vision statement on adult education – inclusive of all adults, regardless of work status or educational goals – rather than workforce development, while recognizing how adult education advances the workforce (ex. incumbent workers) in critical and tangible ways. In order to capture the complexity of the adult education system’s impact on the state, they suggested including an introduction about the purpose of adult education prior to presentation of the vision statement. The group suggested that all working groups be convened together to share and discuss vision statements, recommendations and guiding principles.

The group also returned to a discussion of principles that they believe should guide the resources strategy and vision for adult education in the state. First, it is important to identify and recognize private funding that is/could be dedicated to adult education – this includes employers that invest in their workers directly and through the JDF. Second, the system needs to encourage greater investment by businesses in adult education. Many employers are not even aware that their workers are receiving publicly funded skills education. Ultimately, the group agreed that resources for adult education should support innovation to solve challenges and improve access and outcomes for students.

At this meeting, the group also discussed the possibility of expanding the work of the RIAEPDC. For example, what if the RIAEPDC became a trade organization? The advantage of this would be that the RIAEPDC could coordinate group purchasing for the field, etc. while continuing to offer professional development. Like other trade organizations, it could be restructured to include a membership component, where members pay in to coordinate services. The RIAEPDC could also serve in the role of convener, bringing together adult education providers, other service providers and businesses at forums (1-2 a year) to collaborate on solutions.

**Vision Statement *(revised)***

Rhode Island commits to an innovative adult education system that:

* *(Access)* Ensures that all Rhode Island adults will have ongoing access to high quality, student-centered learning opportunities and support to empower them to articulate and achieve their goals.
* *(Connections)* Creates and supports connections and collaborations among community providers and partners that enable adults to participate meaningfully in the workforce, the economy, and society.
* *(Resources)* Maximizes and leverages resources for a highly effective infrastructure that supports coordination and services to meet the diverse needs of adult learners equitably across the state.

**Recommendations *(in order of priority)***

**Challenge #1**: Participants agreed that it is essential for the adult education field and other stakeholders to have a political voice and be able to advocate for improvements to the system in an ongoing way. Rhode Island must develop a leadership structure for adult basic education that will maximize and leverage resources.

***Recommendation:*** Ensure that there is a state director for adult education who reports directly to the state’s Commissioner of Education. Elevate adult basic education leadership to be an equal partner on the state level with leaders of other state education systems. *This is the group’s top recommendation.*

***Recommendation***: Create a leadership group to advocate (and coordinate advocacy?) on behalf of the adult education system. Continue to participate in theWorkforce Alliance. Strengthen advocacy efforts to bring in and maintain more resources from state and federal funding streams.

**Challenge #2:** Participants agreed that it is important that the adult education system leverages collaboration between programs and with other systems around common goals to maximize resources, including space, technology, and funding.

***Recommendation:*** Co-locate adult education programs in buildings that have high-speed internet and shared technology.

***Recommendation:*** Partner with other state agencies and private funders to identify funds and approaches that provide services to all adults, regardless of work/employment status.

***Recommendation:*** Ensure that funding follows 17- and 18-year-olds from local school districts to adult education programs when they are placed there under alternative learning plans (ALPs).

***Recommendation:*** Develop a performance-based funding formula that supports innovation and collaboration.

**Challenge #3:** Participants agreed that greater coordination and centralization of resources have the potential to increase impact. Improved technology is an important part of this, including expanding capacity (ex. broadband access).

***Recommendation***: Identify approaches to ensuring highly effective infrastructure – what are other states doing? How are they organized, etc.?

***Recommendation***: Fund a department or center to implement shared services, such as case management, distance learning, and other innovative approaches such as a mobile van that reaches hard-to-serve communities. Develop a cell phone app or other online software that could support anywhere/anytime learning for adult education students.

***Recommendation***: Conduct a needs assessment to identify priorities based on demand for each type of adult education offering in different parts of the state.

***Recommendation***: Design a centralized resource development position that can identify funding opportunities and facilitate collaborative grants. Create a centralized public listing of private and public grant applications.