

## **A Protocol for Serving Older Workers**

### **November 3, 2004**

#### **Goal:**

Our goal is to infuse the One-Stop Career Center system with innovative strategies for tapping into an underutilized labor pool. The strategies will help address potential worker shortages by providing workforce services to older Americans and exploring ways for engaging older workers in response to the rapidly changing skills demands of business.

By 2030, as the baby boom generation ages, 20 percent of the population, or about 70 million Americans, will be 65 or older, compared to 12 percent today. Given current immigration policies and retirement trends, combined with lower birth rates in recent years, the aging and retirement of the baby boom generation will likely result in a workforce that will be growing more slowly and becoming more diverse. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as the participation rate of older age groups increases, the older population's share of the workforce will also rise.<sup>1</sup>

Whether they are planning on starting a new career, continuing work in their current job, or searching for rewarding part-time work opportunities, mature workers, aged 55 and older, possess the essential qualities needed for today's jobs. Employers are beginning to recognize the value that older workers bring to the workplace including responsibility, loyalty, dedication, and their ability to be effective mentors to younger employees. Older workers' value lies in their attention to detail, emphasis on customer service, and the technical skills and experience they bring from the medical, engineering, and manufacturing fields.

Although the One-Stop system serves a significant number of older workers (5.6 percent of those served during Program Year 2002 were aged 55 and over<sup>2</sup>), it has historically directed mature workers to the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). While the SCSEP is a valuable asset for serving older workers, it should not be the only option available to them. SCSEP, in fact, serves only low-income individuals aged 55 and older and has capacity to serve approximately one percent of the eligible population. This approach has limited business and industries' access to older workers and mature workers' choice with regards to the myriad of workforce investment services available for them through the One-Stop Career Centers. Mature workers provide One-Stop Career Centers with an invaluable asset for meeting the needs of their business customers. It is important for the workforce investment system to capitalize on

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<sup>1</sup> Toosi, M. (2004, February). Labor force projections to 2012: the graying of the U.S. workforce. *Monthly Labor Review*. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> WIASRD data:

[http://www.doleta.gov/Performance/results/WIASRD/PY2002/WIA\\_Summary\\_02\\_adult.pdf](http://www.doleta.gov/Performance/results/WIASRD/PY2002/WIA_Summary_02_adult.pdf)

this talented pool of workers by ensuring that the full array of One-Stop Career Center services are made available to them.

Our workforce investment system must be geared to serve a larger number of older workers by forging partnerships with business, industry and mature worker intermediaries to ensure successful placement of older workers in jobs and to rapidly respond to business demand. Businesses, on their part, need to develop strategies to attract and retain older workers, such as introducing alternative work arrangements and phased retirement programs.

The following outlines a set of action steps the various stakeholders need to embrace to achieve the stated goal of connecting employers to older workers and older workers to jobs.

**Stakeholders:**

The success of the strategies to provide better services to businesses and older workers revolves around the full engagement of the stakeholders' capacities and resources. In devising the respective protocol, six stakeholders have been identified:

1. U.S. Department of Labor
2. State Workforce Investment Boards
3. Local Workforce Investment Boards
4. One-Stop Career Centers
5. Mature Worker Intermediaries and Service Providers
6. Business and Industry

**U.S Department of Labor**

**Proposed Action Steps:**

- Provide leadership to the public workforce investment system through policy issuances and models for effective strategies for linking mature workers to businesses that need skilled workers, such as the national partnership between AARP and a number of major businesses, e.g., Home Depot.
- Promote increased awareness and use of electronic tools, such as Monster.com, Career Builder, and the *CareerOneStop* operating system, including the Online Coach—a tutorial resource on utilizing the E-Tools—to enhance job search and placement services to untapped labor pools such as mature workers.
- Promote partnerships that educate and assist businesses in connecting to the full range of services provided by the local workforce investment

system. Heighten awareness of the crucial role mature workers play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce among national employers and partners.

- Work collaboratively with state and local partners to develop outreach strategies geared towards untapped labor pools such as older workers utilizing existing efforts such as the High Growth Job Training Initiative.
- Assess the current Workforce Investment Act (WIA) performance goals for One-Stop partner programs to determine unintended consequences (i.e. not considering part-time job positions as a performance measure) that might have a negative impact on One-Stop incentives to serve untapped labor pools such as older workers.

### **State Workforce Investment Boards**

Proposed Action Steps:

- Develop state policies and requirements that direct and support the development and inclusion of enhanced services to older workers in the statewide workforce investment system.
- Negotiate WIA performance standards with the U.S. Department of Labor that better reflect the services offered to older workers by One-Stop partner programs.

### **Local Workforce Investment Boards**

Proposed Action Steps:

- Conduct a local labor market environmental scan and an analysis of the labor shortages facing businesses and industry and the untapped labor pools in the local workforce investment area, relying on electronic tools such as the Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) which reflect the local employment and demographic trends.
- Use the Power of e<sup>3</sup> (employment, education, and economic development) to work collaboratively with business, industry, education and training providers, and economic development organizations to develop strategies for connecting the older worker population with businesses that are searching for skilled workers. Intermediary organizations are a valuable resource in making such a connection.
- Identify stable concentrations of businesses in a local workforce investment area that are experiencing labor shortages and channel their needs to achieve effective placement of untapped labor pools including older workers.

- Forge partnerships with training and educational institutions, such as Community Colleges, that would provide intensive and targeted basic computer-literacy training courses to mature workers or other skill-based training to help equip mature workers with today's skills.
- Ensure activities authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 are represented by membership on WIBs, as required by the Workforce Investment Act. These activities will assist WIBs by leveraging their expertise, outreach, and existing networks to enhance WIB decision-making.
- Institute education sessions geared to inform One-Stop staff of the unique aspects of serving mature workers.
- Develop a standard process of receiving feedback from area employers utilizing One-Stop Career Center services and engage in continuous improvement practices in response to this feedback.

### **One-Stop Career Centers**

#### **Proposed Action Steps:**

- Collaborate with business and industry to identify and post job vacancies appropriate for mature workers. One-Stop staff would then refer these workers to available job opportunities.
- Educate businesses about alternative work arrangements and phased retirement programs that may attract older workers
- Use Mature Worker Service Providers as workforce intermediaries, reaching out to older workers and referring them for One-Stop Career Centers for services and developing working relationships with businesses interested in hiring mature workers.
- Ensure staff are available to help mature workers navigate computer tools such as web-based software, etc
- Offer a broad array of services, including intensive services, to older workers, based on the local workforce investment area's strategic plan. Align services to better serve older workers and provide workforce solutions to businesses.
- Stress personalized follow-up services and post-placement services to ensure employee employment retention and advancement.

## **Mature Workers Intermediaries and Service Providers**

### **Proposed Action Steps:**

- Create within their websites interactive links to the U.S. Department of Labor's *CareerOnestop* E-Tools, a collection of user-friendly, electronic tools that include America's Job Bank, America's Career InfoNet, America's Service Locator, and the Online Coach.
- Provide the U.S. Department of Labor's Toll Free Help Line with advance notice of upcoming workforce initiatives for enhanced coordination.
- Access national business partners who have a local presence and job openings through America's Service Locator.
- Conduct outreach in local communities to educate businesses and community leaders about the advantages of hiring older workers.
- Serve mature workers by operating as a specialized recruitment arm for One-Stop Career Centers, working collaboratively to connect mature workers to employers with labor shortages.

## **Businesses and Industry**

### **Proposed Action Steps:**

- Participate on local WIBs as a strategic partner, assisting in the development of effective strategies for leveraging untapped labor pools and resources.
- Collaborate with One-stop business resource staff to identify and post job vacancies.
- Partner with Mature Worker Intermediaries to recruit the mature worker labor pool through One-Stop Career Centers, reducing recruitment time and responding rapidly to business demand and worker shortages.
- Be receptive to advertising job opportunities, especially part-time and seasonal work opportunities, for mature workers utilizing America's Job Bank and state and local job posting services.
- Consider alternative work arrangements and phased retirement programs to attract mature workers and accommodate their needs.

- Provide feedback to the public workforce investment system about the quality of referrals and services received at local One-Stop Career Centers.