

Excerpts relating to the Eligible Training Provider List from New Jersey's Unified State Plan for Workforce Investment

(ix) Identify the policies and procedures to be applied by local areas for determining eligibility of local level training providers, how performance information will be used to determine continuing eligibility and the agency responsible for carrying out these activities. Describe how the State solicited recommendations from Local Boards and training providers and interested members of the public, including representatives of business and labor organizations, in the development of these policies and procedures.

In New Jersey, the process of building a comprehensive performance measurement system for occupational and adult literacy education and training programs has been underway since 1999. There is widespread agreement among the State and local partners of the One-Stop Career Center System on a set of core performance measures, key program definitions, a web-based information and collection program, and database file structures capable of providing the underpinnings of a comprehensive system. The partner agencies in this program have been defined in the State Employment and Training Commission's Strategic Five-Year Unified State Plan for New Jersey's Workforce Investment System.

To receive funding through any State or local governmental source, a training provider and program must be approved for inclusion on the State's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The State Employment and Training Commission (SETC), the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) and the Center for Occupational Employment Information (COEI) partner in the management of the ETPL, www.njtopps.com.

The Consumer Report Card (CRC) is the portion of the ETPL that displays training provider performance information to the public. Most providers of quality training welcome the opportunity to advertise their offerings on the Consumer Report Card (CRC) even though those wishing to participate in this voluntary program are required to share certain basic information about their programs and students. While it takes some effort to prepare and submit reports on student outcomes, the resulting information is a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge available to the public about the State's education and training system.

Inclusion of a training provider on the ETPL is neither an entitlement for a prospective student to receive funding from a local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) or One-Stop Career Center, nor a requirement that the WIB or One-Stop Career Center make any referrals to the provider. All potential providers must satisfy specific eligibility criteria established by both the SETC and the local WIB to be eligible to accept students receiving public funds to offset training costs.

The COEI has specific responsibility for the administration of this program. To effectively implement a system for education and training program accountability, the COEI and the SETC require information from every provider regarding each individual who enrolls in an occupational or literacy program. Provider submitted student record information is aggregated and analyzed, and the performance results are displayed on the CRC. On January 12, 2006, P.L. 2005 C. 354 was signed into law in New Jersey. That established the Eligible Training Provider List and the COEI in State law.

Information must be provided at the individual student level using the student's Social Security Number (SSN). It is understood that this is sensitive information. Acquisition and use of a student record containing the student's SSN is governed by the provisions of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. §406, Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. §522a, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. §1232g. Federal law does not prohibit a State or local agency from requesting voluntary disclosure by an individual to provide his or her SSN as long as the requests for disclosure are made in accordance with the Privacy Act.

The submission of individual student enrollment and exit information has to be for all students enrolled in any approved program regardless of their funding source. Two individual records are required for each student, one at the time of enrollment and one at exit.

Performance information on training providers is based on past enrollment and exit data. Performance standards will be developed over time, representing common, agreed upon standards for all One-Stop partners. Information from administrative databases for Workforce New Jersey, the Workforce Development Partnership program, Vocational Rehabilitation, Unemployment Insurance, the Division of Family Development, Vocational Technical Careers and Innovative Programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and UI Wage Records will be used to determine appropriate baseline standards for the One-Stop system. Local areas retain the ability to apply higher standards than those developed by the State. These standards will reflect the needs of the local WIB and be neither arbitrary nor capricious.

Rather than collecting outcomes information through a follow-up survey on wages, placement, retention and earnings, the Unemployment Insurance Wage Record System is used to evaluate outcomes for the measures. This stage of the process presents information based on aggregate data so that individual student confidentiality is maintained.

Representatives of local Workforce Investment Boards, service providers, business, and labor and other members of the public participated in various committees convened by the SETC for the purpose of refining the workforce investment system for the future. Community colleges and vocational technical schools were particularly sought out for their comments. Town meetings were held in the three areas of the State – North, Central, and South – to solicit comments and ideas. Over 6,000 notices were mailed to a broad range of individuals and groups, and over 240 individuals participated in the three meetings. At each of the sessions, comments from the public were considered.

Draft policies and procedures were shared with all interested parties in the early stages of development to allow for their input and to gain consensus. As New Jersey moves toward a comprehensive system of evaluating service providers across all workforce investment programs and services, discussion and focus groups are being held with all those who might be affected by any changes. This type of ongoing consensus building, while time consuming, is essential for moving the system forward.

(x) Individual Training Accounts (ITAs):

1. What policy direction has the State provided for ITAs?

The State of New Jersey uses ITAs as only one part of potential training subsidies. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) as well as the State-funded Workforce Development

Partnership (WDP) grants, PELL Grants, and other funding sources provide financial assistance to those in need of training. The Tuition Waiver Program, a State program to which all State colleges and universities participate, is another State resource. In addition, the State already encourages local agencies to look broadly at sources of funding for training and maximize available resources. A comprehensive service provider assessment system that includes performance data has been developed by the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development. This system is Internet-based. Information is available for individuals planning on entering training, counselors assisting in individual assessments, and program administrators at the local and State levels.

ITAs for occupational skill training for adults, dislocated workers and older youth will be limited to an average of \$4,000, with exceptions approved by the WIB. The State does not limit the duration of training under an ITA. The \$4,000 amount is consistent with the dollar amount prescribed by the State Workforce Development Partnership Program (WDP). The dollar amount for ITAs may be changed to be consistent with any legislated changes in amount prescribed by WDP. No limits will be placed on ITAs under the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Service providers must submit an application to the local WIBs containing a description of the program, program performance and cost information and a certification that information provided is true and that the provider will meet performance and cost requirements imposed by the WIB. In order to apply, the provider must first have received approval of the cognizant State Agency authorized to approve such training. Second, the training must be in a demand occupation as recognized by the Governor. The State of New Jersey has in place a certification process for training programs.

However, this process is not completely centralized—there are, sometimes State entities that, by statute or regulation, are responsible for vendor approval in specific areas. For instance, if the training provider program is not covered by any of the authorized approval Agencies, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development along with input from the Department of Education certifies vendors under P.L. 2005 C. 354. The vendor must complete an application with necessary documentation to receive such a certification.

There are other specific exceptions to this process. The Department of Environmental Protection, for instance, has the authority to approve certain courses and vendors for training in their area. The Casino Control Commission has the mandate to approve casino-related training programs and vendors. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services has the authority to approve work adjustment training, job coaching, and other employment and related services at community rehabilitation programs. Credit courses at higher educational institutions must be approved through the Commission on Higher Education.

By linking performance to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), New Jersey will have a comprehensive approach to assuring the quality of vendors. The centralization of approval provides a measure of uniformity. All vendors in a particular area will be required to meet a minimum level of service in order to be approved. This also reduces redundancy, since not every local entity will need to review and approve a vendor.

The New Jersey State ETPL is used by all partners of New Jersey's One-Stop workforce investment system. The system also identifies supported employment vendors that provide specialized services to individuals with disabilities. Arrangements have been made with the various Departments, including Human Services, Education and Labor and Workforce Development, and Agencies, such as New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, that serve individuals with disabilities, to incorporate their existing provider lists into the statewide list

2. Describe innovative training strategies used by the State to fill skills gaps. Include in the discussion the State's effort to broaden the scope and reach of ITAs through partnerships with business, education, economic development, and industry associations and how business and industry involvement is used to drive this strategy.

New Jersey has been an advocate of ensuring that training is based upon industry-based skill needs. An existing credentials policy relies upon that premise and is tied to our Eligible Training Provider List.

Our provider list is tied to our school approval process, but the term "school approval" is a misnomer. Technically, it is a training service approval as the list includes potential providers from a variety of areas including community groups, faith-based institutions and industry-based groups like retail merchants.

The retail merchant group is particularly exciting as it reflects a partnership between the State, local government, retail merchants and their association. We are operating programs at a number of shopping malls that rely upon this industry-based curriculum for a high growth/demand occupation in our State. This program has been a national model and has been developed in partnership with the National Retail Merchants Association.

The State of New Jersey, in response to a critical need in the area of literacy began a Workforce Learning Links program throughout the State. This program provides literacy labs in each of our workforce areas. These self-paced programs have been designed to improve clients' skills and are provided in partnership with our public television network (New Jersey Network). These facilities have been placed in community- and faith-based organizations, adult education programs, human services organizations and our One-Stops. This effort has allowed us to expand literacy services throughout our communities.