**EXAMINER = ED 101 and Beyond – The Myth behind job training – Part I**

A standard cry/demand during moments of urban and general economic strife is the need for more job training programs - especially in Chicago. But, to a great extent, the State of Illinois provides numerous opportunities for residents seeking to improve their marketability and ability to get a job. The programs are ample and available. But, marketing, administration and execution may be a problem.

Like most states, Illinois receives a substantial amount of training funds through the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). In Illinois, it is administered by the state’s primary economic development agency, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). It is a substantial amount of money. In the current fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2010, DCEO’s Workforce Development Bureau had a budget of $443 million to administer mostly WIA funds. It should be noted that in the previous two fiscal years, the bureau had annual budgets of $282 million. But, this fiscal year it received a significant infusion of federal stimulus (American Recovery & Reinvestment Act) funds.

In terms of eligible uses, they run the gamut. In addition to general job training support, WIA funds initiatives targeting the following types of job seekers:

* Women
* Minorities
* Disabled workers
* Dislocated and recently laid-off workers
* Veterans
* Low-Income Adults
* Youth
* Seniors

WIA funds are also used to focus on specific industries targeted for high-growth. Illinois WIA funds are used to prepare workers seeking jobs in the following industries:

* Construction
* Healthcare (nursing)
* Healthcare (Information Technology)
* Agriculture
* Manufacturing
* Transportation, Distribution and Logistics
* Information Technology
* Green Jobs (i.e. energy auditing and weatherization)

In terms of size, the figures are quite impressive. In Fiscal Year 2010, the Illinois WIA adult, youth and dislocated worker programs were funded at $26.8 million, $62.2 million and $68.5 million respectively.

Those funds are distributed through a network of 26 Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA) that are connected to 98 service providers located throughout Illinois. That level of physical presence ensures that Illinoisans in all 102 Illinois counties have nearby access to WIA resources.

In addition to the worker focused training programs, the State of Illinois also offers training grants for companies to improve the skills of their Illinois employees. The Employer Training Investment Program (ETIP) reimburses new and/or expanding companies up to 50 percent of the costs of training their employees. The main stipulation is that the Illinois – resident must be employed by the company prior to the start of the training program. In State Fiscal Year 2008, ETIP helped train 41,447 workers according to DCEO. Although this figure may be high due to the plight of the national and state economies, state budget projections estimated that ETIP would train 30,000 workers this fiscal year.

To increase access to ETIP and WIA resources, DCEO supplements the reach of the LWIAs and service providers with [www.Illinoisworknet.com](http://www.Illinoisworknet.com). Through that web-site, individuals and businesses can access information on job and industry trends, labor markets and training programs.

The State has also done a fairly good job of integrating the marketing efforts. The Illinois worknet site is advertised on billboards throughout the state and is also promoted via radio and television public service announcements. People who do not have internet access at home can merely go to their public library to use the site. Finally, for those uncomfortable will working on the web, the site has a tool that will direct the aspirant to nearby providers.

So with all of those resources and diligence at promotion, why are there still cries for more job training programs? The key may be in the answers to the following questions:

* Have you ever heard of WIA?
* Have you ever heard of [www.Illinoisworknet.com](http://www.Illinoisworknet.com) ?
* If so do you know how to access them?
* If you have, did they help?

Part II of this article will explore what some of the problems might me.