

National
Association
of Workforce
Boards



Putting Your WIB on the Political Map

*Tips on Marketing, Communications
and Public Relations*

Workforce Board Development Series

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Introduction

This paper describes how a number of workforce investment boards (WIBs) around the country are using marketing and communications techniques and tools to build a visible and assertive presence in their communities. These forward-thinking boards are developing and executing business plans and strategies that use innovative communications tools such as video conferencing, the Internet, and cable TV, as well as fact sheets, brochures, newsletters, events, and media contacts to educate and energize their various stakeholders and to “put their WIBs on the political map.”

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NAWB would like to thank Ms. Shulman and all the contributors for their willingness to share their insights on this important topic.

This is one of a series of NAWB publications designed to provide guidance, technical assistance and advice to the members and staffs of workforce investment boards on topics of importance to their successful governance of the nation’s new workforce development system.

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Why Your WIB Needs a Communications Strategy

In the past, many private industry councils (PICs) operated like human service agencies, with boards overseeing operations, approving contracts and helping clients find jobs. But more and more workforce organizations are realizing that a PIC's narrow focus on one federal program has become an anachronism. As we enter the 21st century, they are widening their purview to include all of the numerous federal, state, local and private employment and training programs that serve jobseekers and employers. Today workforce organizations all over the country realize the need to develop and shape a unified workforce development system by taking a broad, policy-oriented role and serving as a coordinator, convener and independent broker.

The workforce investment boards created by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) are expected to be their community's clearing house and local expert on workforce development issues. Their mandate embraces an entire workforce system: all the public and private training programs, educational institutions, employers, stakeholder organizations that ensure that workers have the best possible employment opportunities and employers have the best possible employees to fill current and future jobs. Effective boards see the business community as a key customer and their role as crafting a workforce development system to meet the needs of employers. As a result of this paradigm shift, a WIB needs to create a new image of itself and to carve out a new role.

In many communities there is a leadership void in this area. Many different organizations—chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, social service agencies, government, and private sector business—consider workforce development as only a minor piece of their overall agenda. Building a better employment and training system is nobody's "brief." But forward-thinking WIBs are recognizing this gap and stepping into it. They understand that the board is *the one* organization within a community that has workforce development as its sole responsibility and focus.

And what will WIBs do in this new leadership role?

- ❖ They will define the workforce development needs of the community and make sure the system is business led and meets business needs.
- ❖ They will achieve collaboration among the various stakeholders, taking into consideration (or perhaps ignoring) their territorial issues for the good of the system.
- ❖ They will build consensus on needs, issues, and priorities.
- ❖ They will provide current and accurate information on which to base decisions.

- ◇ They will define the important issues.
- ◇ They will be at the table when public policy decisions are made.

But how does a board become politically powerful and visible, able to plan, coordinate, and oversee workforce development in the community? To survive and thrive in its new role as leader, expert, convener, and collaborator, a board needs to acquire a broadened perspective, a clear goal, and an understanding of how to get there. WIBs are realizing that to be successful in a business environment they must adopt business techniques. They must gather and use new skills tailored to the information/knowledge age. Among the most critical skills are those that come under the general heading of *communications and marketing*.

Reputation and public image are truly important. Education and training programs are only valuable insofar as they are understood and trusted by those who use the services. It is therefore critical to communicate the workforce investment board's vision to key constituencies, including employers, students, trainees and local service provider agencies. If employers have misconceptions about the quality of program graduates, if students or trainees doubt that participation will be worth their effort, or if other agencies question whether their customers will be well served by coordination with the board, all other efforts to build a quality system will fail.

A board's effectiveness depends not only on its understanding of its local economy and workforce trends, but also on its ability to create a strong positive public image that encourages business participation in programs and generates public support. Developing and maintaining solid partnerships can not only link job seekers to employers, but also produce political support, attract financial resources, enhance a board's image and ensure recognition of the board's legitimate accomplishments.

Public relations and marketing should be, therefore, key functions of the new workforce investment boards—deserving of as much time and attention from members and staff as is spent on strategic planning or program oversight activities.

In many ways, a WIB's need for credibility, visibility and political power is a chicken-and-egg dilemma. In order to have political power, you must have credibility and visibility. But in order to gain credibility and be visible, you must be part of the community power structure and have a political track record.

So just how does the board get invited to the table when the important decisions are made? And how does it ensure that when the chair calls a meeting, the important players show up? What are the steps it must take to be considered a powerful and important player in the political/policy arena. How does the WIB make deals, influence stakeholders, and get money for innovative programs and business products?

Creating a Communications Strategy for your WIB

An effective *communications strategy* is far more inclusive than what is usually thought of as a “marketing plan.” And it doesn’t arise by chance; your WIB has to decide that it’s important. Good public relations are the result of your board adopting a consistent mind set that influences its mission and goals, its willingness and capacity for community leadership, its membership and its ability to commit resources to a logical detailed plan for image-building. The following tips to think about are based on the experiences of some of the nation’s most cutting-edge workforce boards.

Build Political Capital through your Board’s Membership

The starting place for a successful WIB is a board membership composed of knowledgeable and powerful business and community leaders, as the following examples make clear.

Kentucky was a WIA “early implementation” state. As early as July 1999, the Louisville/Jefferson County Workforce Investment Board began to create a new employment and training system that would better meet the workforce needs of community economic development efforts. To accomplish this, the board soon realized that it needed to strengthen its membership and develop a new public image. Working closely with its chamber of commerce and economic development organizations, the board recruited a top-notch membership of CEOs and other high level officials.

According to Executive Director Pamela Anderson, an effective board needs a critical mass of important players. “You need more than one CEO,” says Anderson. “They won’t show up unless their colleagues are there.” Anderson points to the importance of figuring out where the local power structure is and how to penetrate it. This certainly extends to choosing a board chair. “When you have a high-level board chair, people come when he calls a meeting.” This clout extends to advocacy as well. “We’ve got the kind of people that can engage the leadership. They can call the governor,” she adds.

In changing over from a PIC to a WIB, Job Works in Fort Wayne, Indiana, also took the opportunity to go after high-profile business people. They recruited more plant managers and CEOs and fewer human resources department staff, putting great effort into identifying, contacting and cajoling. “We had a pretty good idea of the types of business representatives we needed on the board,” says Job Works President Steve Corona. A recruitment team of influential individuals, including county commissioners, made personal visits to offices and to golf courses. “We didn’t leave it to chance.” The board members view themselves as ambassadors for the WIB. Corona says that his board chair “either hunts, fishes, or golfs with everybody in northeast Indiana.”

In Kansas City, Missouri, recruiting powerful board leadership has long been a priority. In 1984, the chamber of commerce, the Civic Council (a group of CEOs from the 100 largest businesses), and the city council signed a formal agreement called the Greater Kansas City Community Trust to consolidate workforce development, engage higher level business participation, and raise private funds.

With the active involvement of these powerful partners, the Kansas City Full Employment Council (FEC) has been able to attract high level board members over time. Planning carefully for leadership succession has involved recruiting the chair, vice chair, and vice chair-elect years in advance. Past FEC Chairs have included the chairperson of the Kansas City Chiefs, the head of the local power company, the general manager of IBM, a senior vice president of Sprint, and the head of Helzberg Diamond, a major local business. Three of the last five FEC chairs have also been chairs of the chamber of commerce. "If your board has civic leadership, influence automatically accrues to it. That's what gives you access," says Clyde McQueen, President/CEO. The board raises money, removes barriers and creates opportunities for new operations, enabling staff to run better programs.

Even in smaller communities, where *Fortune*-500 firms are scarce, boards should seek community-minded business leaders with stature. "They carry a lot of weight," says McQueen. "This says to elected officials, 'this work is important'."

Building and keeping a strong board requires planning and skill. Boards need to engage in high level dialogue, develop strategy, and stay out of the nitty-gritty of program operations. They do not even need to understand the intricacies of workforce legislation. With knowledgeable staff to identify issues, priorities and resources and to oversee effective operations, the board is free to plan the community's workforce agenda and to serve as catalysts to get it accomplished. "Once you build your board, you need to handle it carefully," says Anderson. "The board's own agenda should be important and energizing, and not bog down in the details of complicated funding regulations."

The Louisville/Jefferson County WIB has made its board's expected role very clear. *The expertise and leadership of the Board are the tools that will really make the difference: as a catalyst for change, a coordinating body of local service innovations, and as a communicator to the community*, states the WIB's master plan.

Stand up and Lead

"In most communities, there is a real leadership void in workforce development," says Pamela Anderson. "And if you say you're powerful, you are powerful." While the Louisville/Jefferson County board was already beginning to be seen as the focal point of workforce development prior to the enactment of WIA, the new law gave it the extra boost it needed to assume leadership of critical local economic development issues. "The timing was good," says Anderson.

Take on important issues. Understanding that a lack of good labor market information hurts both employers and jobseekers, the Louisville/Jefferson County WIB decided to tackle this problem. At its first meeting in June 1999, the WIB commissioned two lengthy studies: an employer survey and an analysis of the skill needs of its labor market area. Once these studies are

completed in Spring 2000, the WIB intends to analyze the results and determine how to meet the identified needs. "Unveiling the results is going to give us a great stage," says Anderson.

When the Kankakee Valley PIC recognized that many local employment issues affected middle-class as well as at-risk jobseekers, it began to study the broader workforce picture, says Linda Woloshansky, head of the Kankakee Valley Workforce Development Services in Valparaiso, Indiana. The board expanded its original mission to include school-to-work and other youth-related issues, initiating conversations with business leaders, school superintendents and other stakeholders. "[The PIC] realized they didn't just have to do the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) stuff," says Woloshansky.

As a result of this and other issues the PIC tackled, when workforce issues come up in public, "nine times out of ten, we're called upon for our opinions, expertise and action," says Woloshansky. A reputation as a group that got things done and an unofficial role as a spokesperson for the strengths and resources of other community-based partners provided the board with the credentials to act as a broker and connector. Tapped by the county commissioners, it coordinated school-to-work efforts and set up a local council to look at welfare-to-work issues. Now board representatives sit at the table whenever the local economic development agency recruits new companies and coordinate all the local training agencies in responding to employer needs.

Become a neutral facilitator. Once a workforce organization has established itself as the community's clearing house for or coordinator of workforce development activities, sometimes its most critical function is simply to provide the conference table and the coffee. "It's all about creating partnerships," says Fort Wayne's Corona, who points to a recent agreement to open training space at the community college. The board's role as the facilitator, its skill in developing alliances, and its success in establishing a win/win situation for all its stakeholders is critical. And as Woloshansky points out, "[The WIB] does not always need to take the lead: sometimes we just help."

Develop partnerships. Alliances can be a powerful tool for accomplishing a goal. The past three labor market surveys conducted by Job Works in its nine Northeast Indiana counties garnered only a 15 to 18 percent response. But the spring 1999 survey was a different matter. Job Works enlisted the help of more than a dozen chambers of commerce, who agreed to send out the surveys to their members under chamber letterheads and participated in follow-up phone calls. The jointly sponsored survey was kicked off with a news conference at the Fort Wayne Chamber, and leading chamber executives were invited to be part of the planning process. This alliance more than doubled the survey response rate.

Since its first meeting, the Louisville/Jefferson County WIB has been seeking ways to develop strategic partnerships with local chambers, education providers, community-based organizations, government agencies and labor organizations. "These community leaders recognize that workforce development is crucial to economic development," says Anderson.

In California, the San Diego Workforce Partnership has built up its credibility and its stature over a number of years by extending its range of expertise through partnerships. Comfortable in its brokering role, the organization has staff out in the community working with business and

offering them workforce solutions. “We are proactive instead of waiting for people to come to us,” says staffer Alison Withey.

As a “boom town,” San Diego’s regional economic development is a high priority issue. “Our power comes from the relationships we cultivate in the community,” says Withey. “People see us as heavily involved not only in providing workforce programs but also in economic development and regional growth issues.”

Develop a Marketing Strategy for the 21st Century

Under JTPA, and CETA before that, “marketing” for PICs meant getting employers to hire graduates. PICs “sold” training slots and “developed jobs” for unemployed job seekers. But today WIBs view the world with a different focus. They see a different environment, different customers, different needs and wants, and different tools. A workforce board needs to adopt a new marketing strategy to identify its customers, determine their wants and needs, and shape its “products” to meet those needs. Although important, trained workers are now only one of the WIB’s products. Today’s successful board needs to provide “higher order” products—such things as vision, leadership, information, quality control, public validation, negotiation and adjudication of disputes—to its varied customers throughout its local community. And to do this, WIBs must re-examine their marketing techniques and tools to make sure they meet these 21st century needs.

Modern marketing theory describes a set of tools as the “four p’s” — product, price, place and promotion. WIBs might think of organizing their marketing activities into the Four Workforce P’s: positioning, planning, professionalism and product.

Positioning: Create the Right Image for your WIB

For a WIB to successfully bring value to its community, positioning is everything. Your organization must agree on how it wants to be perceived by the community in general and individual stakeholders in particular, and then take specific steps to reinforce those images.

A WIB owes its publics an understanding of its new role of representing the business community and its commitment to solving local workforce problems. It must educate its publics about its new role and mission in order to effectively perform that task. In its business plan for 1999-2000, the Louisville/Jefferson County Board presents this powerful rationale for increasing its visibility:

The WIB. . . has a responsibility to the community at large as the ultimate beneficiary of workforce programs. While meeting specific needs of employers and job seekers, an effort will be made to integrate workforce information into community discussion. Government officials, community leaders, parents, and citizens should be informed of ongoing workforce development activities and opportunities. Informed and involved leaders, as well as an educated citizenry are more likely to be supportive of community investment, and more prepared to contribute.

Clearly though, one message does not fit all.

- ❖ *Businesses* will want to know how this new system will make it easy for them to find skilled, reliable, work-ready employees.

- ◇ *Economic development officials* will want to know how to develop a labor force that will attract and keep good businesses.
- ◇ *Education and training institutions* will want to know what skills employers need today and tomorrow.
- ◇ *Service providers* will want to know how this system will help them find jobs for their constituents.
- ◇ *Public officials* will want to know if they are getting the best return on the public's investment.

In Louisville/Jefferson County, for example, the board has positioned itself to be the focal point of workforce development issues. "We don't want to project an image of another targeted program. We want to be where the big decisions are being made," says Anderson. "We want to be seen as having information and solutions, as a group that gets things done, that is funding, not operating programs."

Job Works in Indiana has positioned itself as a resource to business. "We're not in the business of giving away pink slippers [warm fuzzies]," says Steve Corona. "We're performance driven." The organization's position in the community is solidified by its effectiveness at providing value added in the form of "good solid products." "We still serve hard-to-place people. We're selling people that companies don't generally look to." But in taking a marketing approach, "we are changing our sell. Even though they may have some personal issues, these people have skills. . . . [The sell] is easier if they know Job Works and its reputation."

"We are still the place that gets jobs for the unemployed in the community," says Kansas City's McQueen. "We are trying to make the connection between the unemployed and companies who need employees. With the new one-stop, we will be serving a broader population, but we still serve a targeted population. This community wants us to have an impact on that population. We are not trying to avoid that message."

Kankakee Valley has also identified the employer as its primary customer. "We want the employer community to come to us when they have a workforce problem and we want to go to them to gain their insights. We want to be valued and trusted by them," says Woloshansky. In taking a broad, policy-oriented approach to shaping a new workforce development system, in looking at the big picture, and in moving beyond federal programs, WIBs are developing a new, unfamiliar paradigm. This is not without its pitfalls. "We have gone from a value system where we have invested in direct delivery of service to clients," says Woloshansky. "Now, we're changing our thinking to invest in planning, system building, and coordination. This is a huge change in our culture."

Planning: A Blueprint for Success

A marketing plan—the blueprint for the board's public relations activities—can take many forms. Your plan can consist of a simple list of tasks you wish to accomplish over the next three, six, or twelve months, or it can be a comprehensive planning document. Indiana's Job Works, for example, is working from a short list of 10 tasks and intends to develop a more detailed plan later, "when we understand [our role] better."

Louisville/Jefferson County, on the other hand, has developed a detailed planning package with many appendices and sub-plans. Its business plan discusses vision and mission; analyzes its environment, philosophy, and customers; and identifies its various resources and tools. The plan has an executive summary and establishes 12 specific first-year goals. Addenda include demand and supply analyses, board and committee responsibilities, a budget, current labor market information and a detailed targeted plan for improving the boards communications, marketing and public relations.

Louisville's communications plan is based on customizing messages to target audiences, both internal and external, and lists objectives and tools for each audience. Audiences are grouped as follows:

- ❖ Individuals/career seekers
- ❖ Business/industry/employers
- ❖ Community leaders/elected officials/government
- ❖ Service providers/education and training providers
- ❖ Media
- ❖ General public/civic and professional organizations
- ❖ Unions/trade organizations
- ❖ Board members
- ❖ WIB staff

The plan seeks "to provide information that will raise the level of understanding in the community on how to promote a seamless, comprehensive workforce development system, and to be regarded as the regional source of information on workforce development initiatives and research."

A copy of Louisville/Jefferson County's communications plan is attached.

Professionalism: Find or Hire Marketing Experts

Effective workforce boards realize that a professional marketing communications staff is essential to their operations.

"You've got to put resources into top notch staff people," says Anderson. Louisville/Jefferson County has a Director of Communications and Workforce Issues who has a degree in journalism and experience as a congressional press secretary. And because visibility is a high priority, the organization also has a web master. "If you're not promoting what you're doing, you will not be seen as a community player."

A long-time communications veteran, Fort Wayne's Corona has a high profile in the community from his years as a TV journalist. He has served on the local school board since 1981, is a member of numerous other boards, and is a frequent public speaker. He credits his communications experience with helping Job Works achieve high visibility in the community.

Products: Providing Added Value

Visibility and credibility come from consistently providing added value to stakeholders in the form of quality products. One of the first acts of the new Louisville/Jefferson WIB was to launch a two-part comprehensive study of area labor market needs and specific employer workforce needs. The first part, an employer survey conducted by an independent research company, will determine employer needs in key high skilled occupations. The second part, conducted by University of Louisville economists, draws on labor market information from a 23-county area. For the first time, the analyses will provide the WIB with fact-based information on workforce problems from which they can draw policies and solutions. The \$75,000 project is being funded from WIA funds, says Anderson.

Since 1984, Indiana's Job Works has produced a customized labor market survey. Last conducted in Spring 1999, the biennial survey examined 4,500 companies with at least 10 full-time employees. The survey, funded with JTPA and TANF funds and conducted in-house, asked employers about their projected new and replacement hiring over the coming year, wages, educational requirements, workforce skill deficiencies, pre-employment testing and screening methods, and the source of applicants. The survey, which had a 30 percent response rate, was jointly sponsored by area chambers of commerce and considered a valuable and powerful tool by the business community. "The survey has given us stronger and closer rapport with all 19 area chambers," says Corona. "Part of the survey even ended up on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*." The next survey is being underwritten with a \$59,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Commerce.

Job Works is also well known for sponsoring special events which achieve a high level of marketing awareness. Invited speakers have included Albert Shanker, past president of the American Federation of Teachers, and William Julius Wilson, Harvard professor and author of *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. Job Works, with other community groups as co-sponsors, held a community-wide welfare-to-work conference in November 1999 to address concerns that have surfaced since the welfare law was passed.

When it comes to marketing, Job Works even considers its own board of directors to be a target audience. At the inaugural meeting of its new WIB, Job Works set up a video conference with Raymond Bramucci, assistant secretary of labor for employment and training, and Robert Knight, president of NAWB. "They were impressed," Corona reports. All of these activities have garnered ample media time and space for Job Works and its issues.

The Kankakee Valley WIB has recently set up a marketing committee to produce a communications plan, but the board has been producing high-profile products for years. One such product is *Careers*, a local newspaper supplement. Each issue highlights a career by profiling a local individual and his/her job. It discusses average wage, required skills, labor market need, and training resources. With a general circulation of 180,000 and its use in the schools, the supplement has become a valuable teaching tool for students, teachers, counselors, and parents. "It's the best thing we've done," says Woloshansky.

But not the only thing. The organization also produces a cable TV segment, shown 26 times a month, called *Working*. *Working* features interviews with an employer and footage of worksite "best practices." The professionally produced videos, which cost \$200 a segment, are also used

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A 12-Step Plan To Put Your

1. Build a strong board and use it

- ◇ Woo high profile members
- ◇ Involve business
- ◇ Achieve a critical mass
- ◇ Use members as ambassadors
- ◇ Stay out of the nitty-gritty operations
- ◇ Deal with important, big-picture issues

2. Step into the leadership void

- ◇ If you say you're powerful, you are
- ◇ Keep a high profile
- ◇ Meet community needs
- ◇ Be proactive

3. Provide the conference table and make the coffee

- ◇ Create partnerships/alliances
- ◇ Be a neutral facilitator
- ◇ Arrange win/win endings for others
- ◇ Cultivate relationships
- ◇ Let others take the lead

4. Position yourself

- ◇ Decide who you want to be
- ◇ Different strokes for different folks
- ◇ Walk the talk

5. Decide where you want to go

- ◇ Make a plan and follow it
- ◇ Mission & vision
- ◇ What'll it be? formal plan or list of "to do's"
- ◇ Customize your messages

6. Hire top notch communications/marketing professionals

- ◇ You get what you pay for
- ◇ Where the people (staff) lead, the leaders (board) follow

7. Get visible

- ◇ Leave the office
- ◇ Be everywhere; tell your story

WIB on the Political Map

- ◇ Be the expert; serve all your audiences

8. Produce quality products

- ◇ Determine community needs and fill them
- ◇ Deliver labor market info
- ◇ Sponsor community events
- ◇ Create useful tools
- ◇ Stimulate creative board thinking

9. Cash counts

- ◇ Seek independent and varied funding
- ◇ Use board as funders/fundraisers
- ◇ Charge fees for good service
- ◇ Produce outcomes, deliverables, evaluations
- ◇ Don't rely entirely on the feds
- ◇ Get creative

10. Use the right communications tools

- ◇ The old stuff—collateral materials
- ◇ The new stuff—websites, cable TV, video
- ◇ The most important stuff—media
- ◇ The other stuff—events, promotions
- ◇ Logo—pulling it all together

11. Build new paradigm

- ◇ Business first
- ◇ Use policy-oriented approach to shape a new system
- ◇ Invest in planning, system building, coordination
- ◇ Make a community investment

12. At the end of the day you will have. . .

- ◇ Powerful board members on a powerful board
- ◇ The ear of important stakeholders
- ◇ Linked job seekers with employers
- ◇ Brought programs and money into community
- ◇ Increased business productivity
- ◇ Influenced local, state, federal legislation
- ◇ Powerful influence in local economic development activities

by schools for career days. The high cost (\$60,000 per year) is a challenge. While acknowledging that employers enjoy the recognition, Woloshansky says that the board is now planning to conduct a cost-benefit study on the year-old project. Kankakee Valley also produces a quarterly newsletter for its 3,000-person mailing list, which includes elected officials, employers, school personnel, and a general audience. The newsletter features workplace information as well as information on issues such as education, welfare-to-work, and earned income tax credits.

To round out its products, Kankakee Valley produces a “mid-wage” labor market survey. Geared to individuals in the workforce who need to move up to become truly self sufficient, “it should really be called the ‘what’s the next step?’ survey,” says Woloshansky. The survey, a realistic picture of current wages and the location of jobs, is distributed to community-based organizations, welfare agencies, schools, the general mailing list, and is featured on the agency’s web site.

Kansas City’s Full Employment Council considers itself to be an economic development agency with three strategic functions. It offers job development, marketing and customer service to the private sector; career counseling and planning to the job-seeking customer; and data management and evaluation for both. Employment and training consultants provide customer service and marketing consultation to employers. “We came out of the chamber of commerce,” says Clyde McQueen. “We know marketing and customer service is important.”

With a strong committee system, an active executive committee, and a professional staff to deal with routine matters, Louisville/Jefferson County WIB now can use its board meetings as opportunities for its membership to learn about important workforce issues. Board members, who receive background materials well in advance, weigh in on some pretty heady topics. One recent discussion centered on successfully integrating immigrants and refugees into the workforce—a new issue for the local area. Another topic was the development of a new training model—a partnership between the shipping firm UPS, the University of Louisville, and Jefferson Community College—to develop an onsite college for UPS employees who are under 25 years old. Still another discussion involved strategies to make the local area attractive as a place for young adults to settle down and live. “It’s some pretty out-of-the-box kind of stuff,” says Anderson.

The power of providing needed and imaginative services to the community is so strong that some organizations don’t even use the classical marketing techniques, but let their products and activities speak for themselves. The Regional Employment Board of Hampden County in Springfield, Massachusetts has been operating like a WIB for five years. “We don’t gain our visibility from deliberate marketing, but by getting our service information out using channels that are already there,” says Bill Ward, the executive director. “Visibility and power are wrapped up with doing what needs to be done. By doing that well, we have gotten involved in many important issues beyond our traditional JTPA mission.”

Gather and Commit Sufficient Resources

Image building takes time, effort and money. Resources are a projection of leadership. The more money you have, the more visible you will be; the more visible you are, the easier it is to raise money from many different sources.

Kansas City's Full Employment Council has raised more than \$6 million in private funds since 1987, much of it through the efforts of board members. "Our board members know that this is the expectation," says McQueen. "Part of their job is to help us access resources." The staff identifies the needs and provides the support. The board, through its fund development committee, solicits members to either contribute themselves or raise the money. One board member has contributed \$200,000 annually for the past six years. "The ability to provide its own resources in addition to federal funds has given the board a lot of credibility," says McQueen. "You can't talk about it if you don't do it."

Kankakee Valley has also always actively sought funds. "We have never assumed we would get [formula] money," says Woloshansky. "So we have always worked hard to build diversified support." The board recently secured a state department of commerce grant to do strategic planning on workforce issues related to economic development in northwest Indiana. It successfully competed for school-to-work and welfare planning grants. Foundation money has been used to develop a just-in-time one-stop center. Despite its efforts, "money is very tight," admits Woloshansky. "We could be doing a lot more if we had more money."

But cash isn't the only resource available to WIBs. Sometimes just getting out into your community, talking to employers and other stakeholders, and telling your story is a good way to increase your visibility, and step into a leadership role.

When Montgomery County, Maryland, decided to move from an internally focused human service organization to an externally focused workforce board in 1995, the PIC was a relatively invisible organization. A few visionary board members and key staff members set out to increase its visibility and change its image. They attended every breakfast, lunch, reception and dinner in the county—chamber of commerce, industry, civic, community, and political gatherings. They met with individual employers, business associations, and service providers. They appeared before the county council and school board and met with the county executive. They invited state legislative delegates to briefings and talked with interested legislators one-on-one.

And what story did they tell? They discussed the need to link businesses with work-ready employees. They talked about identifying skills, about the need for business to be involved with all levels of education, about mentoring and shadowing, about supply and demand, and about the importance of workforce development as an economic development and a community issue. Through personal contacts and constant networking, these workforce ambassadors were able to create excitement and begin to build an influential board.

Massage the Media

Most people are familiar with the variety of communications tools available to help tell your story. They include tried and true collateral materials—brochures, fact sheets, newsletters, annual reports—that can be professionally designed or developed in-house. They also include planned events such as workshops, seminars, kick-offs, media briefings; speakers bureaus; meetings, job fairs, and trade show displays; and advertising, direct marketing, and promotional goods (tee shirts, key chains, coffee mugs). Newer opportunities include web sites, cable TV, and promotional videos. A simple, attractive logo goes a long way toward gaining recognition and, if used effectively, integrates all your other various tools into one message.

Some WIBs are taking full advantage of one of the newer communication tools: the Internet. Louisville's Anderson explains it in an op ed article written for *Business First*, Louisville's business weekly:

. . . A close alliance calls for good communication flow into the board about community needs and from the board about opportunities to meet those needs.

That's why the WIB launched a Web site, Kentuckianaworks.org. This site is one vehicle we will use to let the community know who we are, what services are available in the community, and special initiatives to meet workforce needs.

The site includes information on goals and responsibilities, a description of employer and job seeker services, special focus on youth activities, a summary of labor market research underway and links to about 30 local employers' Web sites.

The media can be your best friend or worst enemy, but it can not to be ignored. In most areas of the country, workforce development is a hot topic right now. Establishing rapport with your local newspaper reporter or editor, educating him/her about local and national issues, and becoming a information resource are the first steps to good media relations.

Sometimes successful media relations are difficult to measure, but it is easy to measure when they are not successful: "They stop calling," says Corona. He attributes Job Works' success in getting a lot of media space to skill in "working" the media. A qualified staff person should be assigned to speak to the media. Corona suggests that this media contact be responsive to a reporter or editor's needs, aware of deadline pressures, have a good quote available to fill space and time, call back promptly, and generally be helpful.

Louisville/Jefferson County also has used the media effectively to get its message out. The group has established good and regular contacts with the weekly business journal, the daily newspaper and several television stations. The board also seeks the assistance of the press offices of the mayor and others when necessary. Its communications plan sets out some basic techniques for establishing good media relations:

- ❖ Make regular contact with media representatives. Invite input on the types of news that would be of interest to them.
- ❖ Conduct news conferences when warranted, especially as related to new WIB initiatives.
- ❖ Highlight long-term initiatives and partnerships.
- ❖ Conduct press briefings for media representatives about the WIB and its efforts.
- ❖ Develop a schedule to suggest features about the WIB on television/radio news programs and for print publications.
- ❖ Investigate ways to utilize the local cable access channel.

At the End of the Day

Achieving the success of more established boards might seem out of reach for new WIBs struggling to get a foothold in their community. However, every organization has to start somewhere. Establishing some short-term goals and strategies on how to get there is a good first step.

While new boards may need some time to develop an elegant mission, the old adage, “fake it till you make it,” may well apply here. Agreeing on a simple statement, such as “the new workforce organization is dedicated to ensuring that all employers have the work-ready employees they need and all potential employees have the skills appropriate for employment,” may be enough to get started putting your WIB on the political map.

Before embarking upon your strategic plan, or even making a list of things you’d like to accomplish, you need to start by asking a few basic, but not so simple, questions:

- ❖ What community needs must be filled?
- ❖ What products and/or services would meet those needs?
- ❖ Who are your customers/stakeholders?
- ❖ What tools do you have/need to get your message out?
- ❖ What role would you like to play and how would you like to be seen in the community?
- ❖ How will you know if you succeed?

Many of the communications techniques mentioned in this paper are simple and inexpensive and can easily be adapted to your local environment. Others are expensive and complex and require more sophistication and resources. But the bottom line is that increasing your visibility and establishing an important presence by using communications and marketing are critical steps to adding value to your community and to influencing your numerous partners.

What benefits can a workforce board expect to accrue from a successful, well-honed marketing and communications strategy? They are many and varied:

- ❖ Powerful board members will be attracted to a powerful board.
- ❖ The board will be in a prime position to link job seekers with employers.
- ❖ The board’s efforts will result in the increased productivity of local businesses.
- ❖ The board will have the ability to bring more programs and resources into your community to help meet workforce development needs.
- ❖ The board will have the ear and the confidence of powerful and important policy makers.
- ❖ The board’s ability to influence local, state, federal legislation will be enhanced.
- ❖ The board will be positioned as an important player in local economic development efforts.

Having a high-powered communications and marketing strategy is important to your WIB’s success. Just do it!

Louisville/Jefferson County Workforce Investment Board

Communications Plan July 1, 1999–June 30, 2000

The WIB will use a variety of tools to meet the diverse needs of our target audiences. The goal will be to provide information that will raise the level of understanding in the community on how to promote a seamless, comprehensive workforce development system, and to be regarded as the regional source of information on workforce development initiatives and research.

Target Audiences

External:

- ◇ Individuals/Career Seekers
- ◇ Business/Industry/Employers
- ◇ Community Leaders
- ◇ Elected Officials
- ◇ Service Providers
- ◇ Education and Training Institutions
- ◇ The Media
- ◇ General Public
- ◇ Civic and Professional Organizations
- ◇ Unions
- ◇ Faith-based organizations
- ◇ Community organizations
- ◇ Economic Development/Chambers of Commerce
- ◇ Industrial Parks

Internal:

- ◇ Board Members
- ◇ Staff
- ◇ Local Elected Officials
- ◇ City/County Government

Communication Tools

Individuals/Career Seekers

Objective: To provide job seekers easily accessible information to make informed decisions about their education/employment options.

Tools:

1. Market the WIB's Web site, www.kentuckianaworks.org
 - a) Access to current information about certified training providers.
 - b) Links to the major job banks and employer job sites on the Internet.
 - c) Access to the latest labor market information.
 - d) Links to other service organizations' web sites (e.g. Library, Greater Louisville, Inc., one-stop etc.)
2. Link closely with one-stop career centers, education and training institutions, resident councils, neighborhood centers and other organizations that offer workforce/education services.
3. Make regular contact with the mass media.
4. Educate the public on the differences between the WIB and the PIC.

Business/Industry/Employers

Objective: To create a two-way communication exchange with employers, assessing their needs and raising their awareness of the Board's role and the workforce services available.

Tools:

1. Publish and disseminate information about current labor market issues and provide new ideas and solutions.
2. Develop a quarterly newsletter that provides information on current labor market trends, successful business partnerships, new training programs, best practices, and any information that is of value to employers.
3. Publish and disseminate a quarterly workforce "snapshot" report.
4. Host symposiums/seminars for businesses/employers that relate to their workforce needs.
5. Partner with organizations (e.g. University of Louisville) to sponsor/promote job fairs.
6. Market the WIB's Web site.
 - a) Access to information regarding services and initiatives to meet workforce needs.
 - b) Information on current labor market trends.
 - c) Links to other valuable web sites (e.g. Greater Louisville, Inc., One-Stop etc.)
 - d) Highlight useful services that are currently available (e.g. TARC's Job Hunter program).

Community Leaders/Elected Officials/Government

Objective: Create a positive image with community leaders, local elected officials and government representatives who have the power to alter funding/regulations/requirements and significantly impact service delivery.

Tools:

1. Conduct regular communication with state and federal legislators/elected officials representing the WIB area.
2. Set up briefings on the importance of workforce programs and needed funding.
3. Invite them to participate in special WIB events when appropriate.

Service Providers/Education and Training Providers

Objective: To ensure that we are successful in meeting our audiences' needs by coordinating with other agencies and partners as well as education and training providers.

Tools:

1. Involve all providers in compiling information for publications that inform the community on workforce issues.
2. Provide regular opportunities for dialogue between the WIB and its service providers to ensure that expectations are met and that the service providers can respond effectively to evolving workforce needs. Raise the awareness of the Board's role as the coordinating body for workforce services.

The Media

Objective: To recognize that people today spend a lot of time occupied with mass media (newspapers, television and radio) and that it is important for the WIB to utilize this communication tool effectively.

Tools:

1. Make regular contact with media representatives. Invite input on types of news that would be of interest to them.
2. Conduct news conferences when warranted, especially as related to new WIB initiatives.
3. Highlight long term initiatives and partnerships.
4. Conduct press briefings for media representatives about the WIB and its efforts. Specifically target *Business First*, *The Courier-Journal*, local TV and radio stations, and local papers such as *LEO*, *Today's Woman*, and the *Defender*.
5. Develop a schedule to suggest features about the WIB on television and radio news programs and for print publications.
6. Investigate ways we can utilize the local cable access channel.

Civic and Professional Organizations/General Public

Objective: To create a basic understanding of the WIB's purpose in the public's mind and enhance our image as a responsive, proactive organization.

Tools:

1. Produce a general brochure that outlines the WIB's goals and initiatives.
2. Form a WIB Speakers Bureau composed of board members, staff, service providers and local officials to make presentations at local civic club and business organizations.
3. Organize educational symposiums/community forums for the public to attend.
4. Encourage board members and staff to network with local organizations to develop partnerships.
5. Market the WIB's Web site.

6. Involve the community in survey work and focus groups.
7. Highlight employment opportunities in this region.
8. Publish an Annual Report highlighting our accomplishments and performance data.

Unions/Trade Organizations

Objective: To maintain strong working relationships with local unions and trade associations.

Tools:

1. Encourage trade organizations to regularly update the WIB on apprenticeship and journeyman programs.
2. Work cooperatively with the Unions to produce current labor market information regarding layoffs, trend and closings.
3. Market the WIB's Web site.

Board Members

Objective: To keep WIB members engaged and informed so they can effectively implement the local plan, determine short and long-term goals and communicate to the public the importance of a unified workforce development strategy.

Tools:

1. Market the WIB's Web site.
 - a) Establish a private area for all WIB members which will include board minutes, specific board responsibilities, WIB staff contact information, calendar of events and meetings and other valuable information.
2. Meet regularly with the Communications Advisory committee composed of board members who will assist with the annual communications plan, review all publications and make recommendations to staff on how to meet our communications objectives.
3. Send information/brochures about the WIB to all Board Members' employers.

Workforce Investment Board Staff

Objective: The reputation and success of the WIB hinges on its staff members. They must understand and accept the business plan and commit themselves to its implementation.

Tools:

1. Conduct staff orientation on the business plan after its completion and adoption.
2. Assist in the development of a calendar of events, media conferences, etc., and post them in a public area and/or utilize the e-mail system for dissemination of information.
3. Ensure all staff receive current publications such as the workforce snapshot and special publications.
4. Develop formats for effective monthly communication.
5. Market the WIB's Web site as an effective internal tool.

For More Information

For further information on the issues and ideas described in this paper, contact the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) at 202-289-2950, fischerj@nawb.org or any of the following organizations and individuals who have contributed their thoughts and experiences.

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