1. Meeting Summary

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CDBG Working Group

DRAFT Meeting 3 Summary: February 14, 2013

Members: Karma O'Connor, Chris Hall, Ed Suslovic, John Shoos, Mike Roland, Julie Chase, Bethany Campbell, Rob Wood, Tae Chong, Joni Bissonneault

Staff: Mary Davis, Maeve Wachowicz

Welcome: Mary introduces staff and turns it over to Chris. He poses the question of how long to spend reviewing/gathering information and when to transition to nuts and bolts. The Working Group's deadline is a report to the HCDC for their May 8th meeting.

Review of workforce data:

Mike presents workforce data. Since the Working Group is working on matching up Portland residents with Portland jobs, the questions are who in Portland works, and where are the jobs in Portland. Tae goes over some Census data, which he brought because he would like to see the homeless survey include questions about skills/work experience that get at employability.

Discussion of Scope of Work:

The group discusses identifying target populations. The mayor had talked about prioritizing the homeless and immigrant populations in Portland. However, the group is also concerned about narrowing the focus too much. One member suggests looking at commonalities and successes among different workforce development models as a jumping off point, and identifying target populations and/or sectors later in the process. However, other members think that narrowing the scope will help the group be more successful. Another member notes that Portland's foreign-born population, homeless, and the elderly often have greater levels of poverty, so whether those groups are defined or not, that is probably who will be impacted.

One member would like to learn more about income levels of Portland residents and look at the people in "livable wage" jobs. This program could serve people who are employed but need to move up to a more livable wage instead of targeting just "chronically unemployed." Mike says they can break the data down by income level and occupation, but cannot track job progression of individuals to see their "ladder" of job progression over time.

Mary suggests creating a model in which projects that target certain populations get bonus points, so that the broad criteria does not exclude anyone, but the points can function to focus the scope.

Discussion of Example Models:

Beth explains the "Money Follows the Person" model: New Hampshire utilizes this model in which money is assigned to the person served, not the provider of services. One member likes the choice aspect of this model, but some members note that it is harder to track outcomes.

Beth also explains the PowerPay program where funding goes to hire X number of individuals in X number of years, and they help figure out if low-income people fit those jobs. As part of their funding contract, employers only get payments when they hit certain milestones.

Tae talks about the different levels of education among the immigrant community, and that language is a huge barrier to employment. He says that instead of staying in minimum wage jobs, many immigrants start their own businesses. There is also a multiplying effect to these businesses among the foreign-born community; an immigrant business owner will often hire other immigrants or use other immigrant businesses as vendors etc. When talking about employment, we should not just talk about minimum wage and manufacturing jobs but about people being self-sufficient entrepreneurs. Other members agree that with the change in our economy more people are shifting to creating their own opportunities since jobs in those traditional modalities are gone. Tae says that the CEI StartSmart program average costs for helping a new business are $8,000.

Discussion of Outcomes:

Members discuss the desired outcomes – is it the old model of putting people in "jobs"? Helping people be self-employed? Ensuring people are at a sustainable income level? Metrics and time frame are key to this process – how long are we going to track these individuals? Are their incomes going up over those years?

Also conditions and limitations need to be posed on grantees, but there is a gray area, e.g. what if there is a company in Westbrook that will hire Portland residents? Beth comments that that is the point of the Money Follows the Person model; you are focusing on the residents not the location of the companies. However Mary says that a company in Westbrook would not be eligible for Portland CDBG money. Some members think that will not be an issue because we will not necessarily be working directly with employers.

Discussion of Conflict of Interest:

This discussion raises the issue of whether the goal is to work with businesses or with agencies that will create programs. Members believe this point needs to be clarified because it can put them in a conflict of interest position for future applications for funding. Is the Working Group ultimately creating an RFP or is it an advisory body? *The group decides to consult Corporation Counsel about this conflict of interest question.*

However, members discuss that this working group will not literally be creating the RFP, but is playing an advisory role. Their suggestions for criteria will go to the HCDC, then go to council and be open for public input, and then come back to staff. One member comments that the group should make broad recommendations about models and keep focused on the data while staying away from specifics. Mary will talk further with Amy and clarify the conflict of interest question.

Review & Acceptance of Meeting Summary:

John moves, Mike seconds, all vote in favor.

Discussion of examples of other models:

Mike talks about a Competitive Skills model, which combines having a targeted industry with a focus on the job seeker. One member states that we need to balance talking about higher wage jobs in targeted industries with jobs that are feasible for workers with low levels of education. Chris asks Mike to bring more information on this model for next time.

Beth talks about Goodwill's On the Job Training program, which addresses skills gaps and builds relationships with an employer. This program includes a training program that can last up to 12 weeks depending on the level of the job or level of education of the individual. The program reimburses the employer for 50% of the worker's wages for that training time. The Science/Tech/Math program focuses on professional people with credentials, like foreign-born residents who are certified to work in their country, but not here. The program has increased from 5 people two years ago to 140 people this year alone since July. They typically spend about $4,000 per person.

One member observes that there are already many programs and providers in the area; we do not necessarily need more programs, we just need to connect the right populations with the right programs and act as a "matchmaker." Other members agree that we could use this exercise to draw forward the people who are impacting others and help them maximize their effectiveness. One member asks if there is a clearinghouse/database of all these programs. As far as the group knows, there is not.

Mary tells the group that the summer task force talked about organizations partnering up e.g. United Way partnering with a daycare provider and a rideshare provider so that someone who needs training or language classes can access those ancillary services that enable them to go get it. Beth confirms that for the On the Job Training program they provide bus passes, gas cards, or daycare to remove those barriers to people getting a job.

One member asks about the best way to allocate money, and defining the metrics of success. Chris thinks the group should address those questions at the next meeting. One member asks whether incentives would just be bonus points, or also bonus money? Another member thinks applicants should get bonus money if they are serving targeted populations because it takes more money to move low-skilled or chronically unemployed people up to the level of stable, quality employment as opposed to providing simple, key assistance to people hovering on the cusp. One member asks if that is the best way to spend the money, or if the group should focus on the "low hanging fruit" – those people that need simple assistance. John asks Beth to bring criteria and data on the grant serving women, and data on the OJT program – where people started and where they are now. Ed says that there needs to be a spectrum of people served and rewards for serving the neediest populations.

Tae asks if funds can go to asylum-seekers since they are not eligible to work here. Some members say that you can fund the process of seeking asylum, or fund the organizations that provide services to asylees.

Next meeting: February 28, 2013 at 2:30- 4:30 in room 209.