# Measuring Up - Defining Success with ARRA Resources

The stakes are very high as the public workforce system begins ARRA implementation.

Information, ideas and policies are in flux as states just submitted their first monthly report card to The U.S. Department of Labor on July 15, 2009. In the wake of ARRA implementation it is essential that states and local areas establish goals which are supported by metrics. These targets will define success and therefore drive ongoing policies and practices.

At www.recovery.gov, it is clear from the Measures of Performance for WIA participants found there, that certain activities and populations are singled out for scrutiny. The following table shows participant characteristics, and the services provided to them, that are required elements of monthly reporting. Flow statistics must be reported for new and served adults within these categories beginning May 1, 2009. Similar reporting elements are required for Dislocated Workers.

| Characteristics | Services |
|---|---|
| UI Claimants | ITAs |
| Low Income | In Training |
| Public Assistance |    OJT |
| Veterans |    Skill Upgrade |
| Disabled |    Customized |
| | Supportive Services |
| | Needs Based |

It is critical that policymakers debate, understand, and set targets aimed at the above items. While some states and local WIBs are creating additional metrics to define ARRA success, such as cost per indicators or targeted training in high growth sectors, at a minimum WIBs should focus on those highlighted on Recovery.gov.

Once you select the participant groups and the services that you will emphasize, consider the following points in setting targets to support policy.

**1. Do not let the monthly metrics by themselves shape your services**
WIA Performance Measures, as well as these ARRA metrics, should drive program policy considerations rather than dictate specific operational activity. Policy then guides activity by channeling efforts towards achieving appropriate outcomes. The appropriate outcomes are not always a blind increase in a highlighted metric. Monthly metrics are better used to understand your current baseline numbers and ratios, benchmark with other states and WIBs, track historical performance for these groups and activities, and then set ambitious targets. More is not always better as illustrated below.

- Assume you are 30% above the state or national average of UI eligible participants in your adults served. Should you target an increase in this ratio? Such an increase might result in a decrease in the ratio of new low income adults served.

- Assume you are 20% below the percent of public assistance participants served compared to other states. Should you significantly increase this ratio with your expanded funding? The reason for underrepresentation may be a fully funded public assistance program now exists and dual enrolling in WIA would provide no real value to customers.

- Assume your ITA activity is very high and your OJT is very low. Once you examine outcomes; however, you determine the training related placements from selected ITAs are very low. You could then decrease ITAs in selected occupational areas and focus on a dramatic increase in OJT.

Under any of these scenarios, some of your targets for the reportable items would (and should) decrease from pre-ARRA days, but for all the right reasons. A failure to recognize the conditions you are attempting to improve can result in goals that do more harm than good.

**2. Use your expanded funding to rethink, transform, and possibly recast your workforce system.**
After ten years of diminishing funds, the doubling of WIA funds presents an opportunity and an obligation to re-examine all of your policies, practices, and strategies. The core issues are who is served, with what service, and with what outcomes. Answering the following questions will allow policymakers to make critical decisions driven by data, not by reporting requirements, precedent, or convenience. Again, look at trends over the last couple of years and benchmarked with other States or WIB areas to add meaningful context.

a) What groups (educational status, income, employed, unemployed, etc ) have been served by your adult, dislocated and youth programs?

b) How do these compare with similar states or WIB areas?

c) What outcomes have been achieved for each group? What are your successes and failures and what level of services (Self Service, Core, Intensive, Training, and types of training by occupation) has been provided to these groups?

d) What outcomes (Entered Employed, Average Earnings and Earnings Gain) have been achieved by level of service?

e) How does your cost per served and cost per exiter compare with other similar states and WIB areas?

The end result of your planning process should result in specific metrics that will define your overall success in June 2010 and June 2011 and reflect a consensus of all stakeholders.

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FutureWork Systems provides ARRA analysis and reporting capabilities within their Performance Matters Plus decision support system. To assist in your ARRA planning efforts, visit http://www.futureworksystems.com/pdf/FutureWork_Systems_ARRA_Dashboard.pdf to download a free, interactive ARRA dashboard based on PY 2007 public WIASRD records and baselines.

FutureWork Systems' Partner, Ken Ryan, has over 30 years of direct and diverse experience in all aspects of the public workforce development system.

FutureWork Systems is the leader in Web-based decision support technology and performance management services for the Workforce Development community since 2000. The company delivers their hosted decision support web application service, Performance Matters Plus, to states and local workforce areas across the country to assist in the tracking, reporting and analysis of WIA, Wagner-Peyser, Trade Act and ARRA performance. ∎