

# **Community Engagement in Illinois Workforce Advantage (IWA)**

Fall, 2000

**Background:** With a State Steering Committee in place and with the project having been announced publicly, it is time to commence engaging with the six IWA community areas in the joint planning of IWA initiatives. This is a critically important phase of IWA's implementation, since this is the process that will build the trust and establish the local 'buy-in' of its efforts.

**IWA's Priority Outcome Indicators:** IWA's projects will be framed with its commitment to making measurable improvements in the input and outcome indicators in the localities.

## **Objectives for Community Participation in IWA:**

1. To generate tangible IWA projects that address critical state performance indicators as well as critical community priorities
2. To strengthen the capacities of communities to engage in community and economic development.
3. To establish an ongoing IWA working group in each community area.
4. To establish a stable, competent staffing and technical assistance team for each working group.
5. To establish an ongoing dialogue between the local IWA working group and the state steering committee.
6. To generate a positive marketing approach, identity and buy-in for IWA in each locality.
7. To establish an effective and efficient process for the joint, state-local design of IWA projects.

## **Four Types of Project Development**

- 1) **Creation of Virtual Family Resource Centers: An IWA Centerpiece**  
A virtual family resource center in each place will improve the community's overall capacity to support and strengthen families. It will encourage the co-location or electronic linkage of primary health, job training, family support and other critical services. It will also enable parents and families to participate in planning, implementation and evaluation of community programs.
- 2) **Projects that Bridge the Digital Divide and Increase Community Capacity to Use Information and Communication Technology Effectively**  
IWA will strive to help communities improve their digital infrastructure and the technological skills of students, parents and families. Projects will be those that communities identify as important

and that are feasible for the State to help implement. Private-public partnerships will be sought out wherever possible to carry out projects that bridge the digital divide.

- 3) **Projects that Improve the Environment, Invest in Economic Infrastructure and Create Jobs** Through the state-local dialogue structured by IWA, economic development and environmental clean-up grants will be targeted for IWA communities. Grants already “in the pipeline” will be examined for how they might leverage additional public and private investments.
- 4) **Special Projects that Address Youth and Family Risk Factors, Draw on State Resources Available to IWA and Utilize Assets Unique to Each IWA Community** Because state agencies and the Governor’s Office place a high priority on IWA’s success, some opportunities for projects will emerge as IWA proceeds. IWA will enable communities to interact closely with state agencies with resources and expertise that address unique issues. The state-local dialogue in each place will surface such potential projects and then enable negotiations about how to best address them, given agency legislative mandates, available resources and community support. State resources will also be examined for how they can leverage private and public support for these initiatives.

**Composition of Local Working Groups** The composition of each working group will vary, given the different characteristics of each community. However, there are certain groups and organizations whose involvement would be important in any locality.

- City and county government
  - Planning/economic development department
  - Police
  - Public health
  - Human services
- Public school district
- Local Workforce Investment Boards and IDES one-stop centers
- Primary health providers
- Private/nonprofit economic development councils/organizations (including community development corporations)
- Family support/resource centers
- Community organizations, including religious congregations
- Colleges and universities
- Other local, state-funded agencies recommended by IWA state steering committee members

**Roles of Local Working Groups** Local working groups will be the bodies that bring the community perspective into IWA decision-making and project development. With the assistance and guidance of IWA staff and technical assistance, the working groups will develop priority lists of problems, risk factors and resources that will aid in the formulation of action strategies for addressing IWA performance indicators. They will

recommend projects, help generate local support for recommendations and encourage local collaboration with state agencies in seeing that implementation succeeds.

**Relation to Existing Collaboratives in Localities** Given the emphasis in many policy arenas on collaboration, there will likely be groups in each locality who have become accepted as conveners of multiple, diverse interests in their fields of activity. In some cases, it might make the most sense to work with one or two existing collaboratives as hosts for some IWA working group activities. In other cases, it might be best for IWA working groups to coordinate their activities with existing collaboratives, but to establish separate forums. Even as it avoids duplicating the work of existing collaboratives, it will be important that IWA establish a clear and unique identity in each locality. The decision on how to proceed on such matters will depend on what will lead to the highest likelihood of impacting IWA performance indicators.

### **Phases of Community Engagement with IWA**

1. Preparation-Pre-engagement—this work is already well underway. It includes the data gathering on programs and contacts conducted by the IWA steering committee. It also includes the collection of indicators that buttressed the decision to choose these six communities. Moreover, it includes the formulation of an IWA operational plan and structure.
2. Opening Forums (Beginning November, 2000 through December, 2000) A community forum on IWA will take place in each setting to publicly start the project. Prior to the forum, one-on-one meetings and possibly a group meeting with 8-15 critical leaders will help form consensus and build an initial sense of ownership. A community forum will publicly kick-off IWA. Ongoing working groups will be formed during the forums.
3. Strategic Risk and Resource Assessment (to be completed within 8-10 weeks of the local announcement and community forum, January through March, 2001) This pragmatic study phase will not involve comprehensive community assessments. Rather, it will work within the IWA project priority areas (see above) and examine the current risk factors putting youth in jeopardy of dropping out of school, delinquency, violence, substance abuse or other harmful behaviors. It will also examine deficits and resources present in each community in the area of digital technology and economic development. It will prioritize the risk factors that could most feasibly be impacted through IWA, the deficits that should be addressed and the resources present locally that should be targeted for enhancement.
4. Plan strategic IWA initiatives in each community (to be completed within 4-6 weeks of the completion of the strategic risk and resource assessment, February through April, 2001). With the risk and resource assessments complete, each working group will identify actions that state and local organizations can take. These actions might include repositioning or relocation of staff or programs, refinement of programs programs, rechanneling of grants, redesign of contracts, modest requests for new funding from state, federal or private sources, technology enhancement or other actions deemed necessary to address risk factors, deficits and community

strengths. There will also be a focus on how to improve coordination and communication among critical health and human service programs, including one-stops, in order to create high quality, virtual family resource centers. Action plans will identify responsibilities for actions and timetables for accomplishing them. Working groups will establish short-term objectives, requiring actions that can be achieved within 4-6 weeks, and objectives that will require longer-term implementation.

5. Implement strategic initiatives in each IWA community.(Ongoing, beginning with the completion of the strategic plan, short-term action plans implemented within 4-6 weeks, March-May, 2001) Implementation will entail considerable back-and-forth dialogue, negotiating and problem-solving between state agencies and local working groups, seeking to implement feasible, effective strategies that address the priorities formulated by working groups and that address IWA outcome indicators. The working groups and IWA steering committee will move from acting as analysis and planning groups to action and monitoring groups. They will see that the plans are operationalized, They will monitor progress and make adjustments in strategies and methods as problems emerge and obstacles surface.
6. Evaluate the outcomes of implementation. Planning in step 4 will have identified specific outcome measures that can serve as the basis for evaluation. Quarterly reports to the IWA steering committee will track the project's progress. An annual evaluation report, due at the end of July, 2001 will assess the progress of IWA during its first year of operation. Beginning October, 2000, quarterly review of outcome indicators will commence, with reports issued by the IWA Steering Committee.

### **Time Frame**

The IWA community initiatives will be phased in sequentially, one to two weeks apart.

- Opening forums: November-December, 2000
- Strategic Risk and Resource Assessments Completed, January-March, 2001
- Strategic Plans Completed, February-April, 2001
- Short-term implementation completed, March-May, 2001
- Long-term implementation time frames dependent on nature of action required.
- First complete evaluation by Steering Committee, July 31, 2000