

Commonwealth Partnership for Economic Opportunity

The Commonwealth Partnership for Economic Opportunity (CPEO) is a joint effort of Commonwealth Corporation and the Commonwealth Workforce Coalition (a project of the Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation which is overseen by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development). Funded by a grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services, this project will work to address Massachusetts' critical need to build the capacity of a range of organizations (community, faith-based, and state agencies) to coordinate workforce development programs and support services resources to provide low-income adults and youth who are not engaged in school or work with the tools and resources they need to enable them to compete for jobs in our knowledge-based economy.

This capacity-building project has three major components:

1. Provide training and resources to connect CBO/FBOs with the public workforce development system and with American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) benefits and workforce development programs;
2. Provide focused technical assistance to a smaller group of CBO/FBOs on topics they identify as essential to their success, such as partnership development, and
3. Strengthen the ability of the two lead partner organizations to plan for, and implement ongoing statewide capacity building activities.

Program Service Area

The service area for CPEO is comprised of five regions whose residents struggled, even before the recession, to compete for high-skill high wage jobs. The urban centers of these regions have had poverty rates that are higher than the state average and employment to population ratios that are lower than the state as a whole:

<u>CPEO Region</u>	<u>WIB Region</u>	<u>Town</u>
Northeast	Merrimack Valley	Lawrence
Northeast	Greater Lowell	Lowell
Southeast	Brockton	Brockton
Southeast	Bristol	Fall River
Southeast	Greater New Bedford	New Bedford
Greater Boston	North Shore	Lynn
Greater Boston	Metro North	Chelsea
Central	Central	Worcester
West	Hampden County	Springfield
West	Hampden County	Holyoke

Program Description

Community and faith-based organizations play an essential role in the public and community systems serving job seekers with low skills, limited work experience and other barriers to economic sufficiency, including youth who are disconnected from work and learning. Because of their roots in the community and their cultural competence, these organizations are trusted sources of information for our most disadvantaged residents. However, particularly in regions outside of Boston, these organizations are typically very small and under-resourced. They are unable to afford professional development for their staff and find themselves struggling to get clear and reliable information about changing labor market dynamics and the benefits, resources and programs that would help residents prepare for jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

In research conducted by the Commonwealth Workforce Coalition, fully 93% of respondents voiced concerns about a lack of training for workforce development staff. Separate research done by Commonwealth Corporation on the governance and coordination of the workforce development system showed that customers of CBOs and FBOs valued the assistance they were already receiving but wanted staff to provide them with career guidance so that they could invest their limited time and resources in education and training that would be most likely to prepare them for success.

Capacity Building Program Objectives

- Raise awareness among community-based and faith-based organizations, particularly among communities disproportionately affected by the economic downturn, of the menu of expanded services and programs in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and how to access those services.
- Improve career counseling and job search assistance in an environment in which the ratio of unemployed workers to vacancies is more than five to one.
- Create referral relationships among community and faith-based organizations and the public workforce system, to serve job seekers and position communities for recovery.
- Broaden and deepen the relationships between state agencies and CBOs/FBOs.
- Formalize the relationship and the capacity building strategy of two state quasi-public agencies that provide technical assistance to CBOs/FBOs to provide quality workforce services.

Expected Products/Outcomes

- Develop and deliver training on The MA Job Guide, a web-based job development tool designed to facilitate improved and customized services to job seekers.
- Develop and deliver a series of trainings for CBO/FBO staff focused on capacity building topics.
- Develop a shared plan for continuing the capacity building activities that includes an evaluation, program design, and funding strategy beyond the 24-month grant period.
- 75% of the organizations that take part in capacity building programming (training and technical assistance) will report at least two changes in their operations (service delivery structure, outreach plan, how they work with employers, management structure), and will report an increase in their ability to deliver workforce services.
- 75% of the organizations that take part in training related to the public workforce system and ARRA benefits will report an increase in their ability to refer residents for ARRA benefits.
- 75% of organizations that receive training on the web-based job guide will report that using the job guide improves their ability to work with residents to secure employment.
- 100% of staff at Commonwealth Corporation and CWC who are responsible for providing technical assistance will report an increase in their knowledge of and strengthened relationships with CBOs/FBOs that provide workforce services in high need communities.

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