



**Virgin Islands**

## THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM

Program Year 2001 marked the second year of services provided by the Virgin Islands Career Network via the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. During this year the system grew to include more eligible service providers offering training in a variety of areas. Additional core and intensive services were made available to WIA customers who needed an extra boost to enhance or change careers and various marketing techniques were employed to promote the advantages of the new Workforce System.

As part of the process of continuous development, the State Workforce Board revisited the goals described in the five-year plan to determine how well the ideals compared with actual practice. The goals called for:

- ◆ Developing the workforce around the local market economy;
- ◆ Creating a solid service infrastructure that allows for continuous growth; and
- ◆ Preparing customers for greater local opportunities.

Based on lessons learned in the first year, the State Workforce Board concluded that in order to meet the second and third goal, the first needed to be more thoroughly explored. The Board commissioned a Demand Occupation Study that sought not only to disclose the growth occupations in the Territory, but more importantly to ascertain the general atmosphere within the business community, which now operates in a depressed economy.

### *The Local Market Economy*

The Unemployment rate in the Virgin Islands continued to rise during the program year. In July 2001 the Territorial unemployment rate stood at **6.8%**, with a rate of 8.0% in the St. Croix district and 5.9% in the St. Thomas/St. John district. In June 2002 the Territorial unemployment rate had steadily climbed to **8.8%** territory-wide, with St. Croix at 10.8% and St. Thomas/St. John at 7.1%.

The aftershocks of the events of September 11, 2001 sent the hospitality industry, the staple of the St. Thomas district's economy, into a tailspin with unemployment levels in that district alone reaching 7.7% by November. Coupled with the downturn of the hospitality industry and the completion of cyclical projects typical of the refinery industry, St. Croix's unemployment level reached 9.0% by November 2001.

The hospitality industry gradually rebounded during the next few months but nowhere near levels projected before September 11<sup>th</sup>. The biggest casualty proved to be hospitality related businesses – typically, small business that feed the larger hotels and restaurants. These businesses were among those most likely to create entry-level positions, ideal for the customers of WIA.

## The Cost of Business

The total WIA Title I allotment for the US Virgin Islands in Program Year 2001 was \$2,478,540 disbursed as follows:

CATEGORY	ALLOTMENT
<b>Youth</b>	\$ 890,320
<b>Adult</b>	\$ 594,010
<b>Dislocated Worker</b>	\$ 994,210
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$2,478,540

### *Youth Activities*

As in years past, more youth sought the services of the WIA system at the start of the summer months. Since the year round program has been initiated, a mix of the ten program elements have been made available to them in addition to the work experience that most seek during this time.

Upon determination of eligibility, an objective assessment of each young person's interest is conducted. The assessment includes a review of the youth's basic and occupational skills, prior work experience and employability, interest and aptitude, and supportive service and development needs. An Individual Service Strategy based on the SCANS skills is developed for each young person.

As youth complete each objective identified in their individual service strategies, certificates are issued. Copies of these certificates plus evaluation forms and examples of their work, including a current resume, are placed in each customer's career portfolio.

During Program Year 2001, there were three hundred and eighty two (382)-planned enrollments for youth. Actual enrollment was four hundred and twenty six, (426). Of those, three hundred and forty one, (341) were younger youth and eighty-five, (85) were older youth.

All youth that participate in work experience are enrolled in Life Skills Management workshops as part of their service strategy. Modules presented cover issues such as *Employability Options; Money Management; Work Readiness Tips and Getting Along on the Job.*

Follow up services for the required twelve-month period took many forms to include mentoring, tutoring and the provision of supportive services. Progress reports or informational surveys were conducted with those who needed little or no direct follow up services.

Other program elements were made available to youth through programs offered by eligible Youth Providers, specifically comprehensive guidance and counseling, tutoring and study skills training, leadership development opportunities and supportive services. Several of these elements were couched within cultural development programs, which added a relevancy to real life – a proven effective strategy for youth development programs.

#### *Adults and Dislocated Workers*

A total of \$1,593,220 was allotted to the adults and dislocated workers program for PY'01. After statewide and local administration costs were determined there was \$454,417 available for program operation for adults and \$570,428 for dislocated workers. \$190,143 was available for Rapid Response Services. In addition to training services, these funds are also used for core and intensive services not provided by partners.

The System anticipated serving four hundred and fifty (450) customers through Individual Training Accounts during the program year. By June 2002, five hundred and sixty-nine (569) customers had been served.

<b>CUSTOMERS</b>	<b>ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN</b>	<b>ST. CROIX</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Adults	191	221	412
Dislocated Workers	50	107	157
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>569</b>

Individual Training Accounts (ITA's) are capped at \$3,400 per customer per program year. Each participant is not however, entitled to the full amount. The customer's Individual Service Strategy (ISS) determines the amount of each ITA. Actual expenditures for Program Year 2001 are as follows:

<b>DOLLARS</b>	<b>ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN</b>	<b>ST. CROIX</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Adults	\$210,735.70	\$539,673.00	\$ 750,408.70
Dislocated Workers	\$ 73,649.88	\$243,420.00	\$ 317,069.88
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$284,385.58</b>	<b>\$783,093.00</b>	<b>\$1,067,478.58</b>

Total expenditures reflect carry-in amounts from the previous program year.

There was a greater demand for core and intensive services to dislocated workers than ITA training services. In general, dislocated workers participated in Life Skills workshops that covered subjects such as *Money Management In Between Jobs; Stress Management; Anger Management and Planning for the Next Career*. They also accessed job-search and resume preparation courses.

Many individuals in the hospitality areas soon returned to their positions or were hired in similar occupations. The same held through for those employed in the industrial and construction trades, though at a much slower pace. Some

customers also took advantage of services received through the reemployment services program.

For adults and dislocated workers eligible for individual training accounts there was training available for many of the Territory's demand occupations. Offerings included basic, intermediate and advanced computer skills, accounting and office management, vocational studies, welding and pipefitting, hospitality and retail merchandising, nursing assistant and practical nursing and basic skills training. Further, through the University of the Virgin Islands several customers had the opportunity to take courses that enabled them to complete or get started on an academic degree.

#### *Partner Activities*

Funding for the Employment Service or Wagner-Peyser activities for PY'01 was \$1,468,896. There were two thousand, eight hundred and eighty nine (2,889), job orders placed during the program year. Ten Thousand, One Hundred and Twenty-four (10,124) customers were served in the Territory this year. A total of seven thousand, seven hundred and eleven (7,711) customers received core and intensive services. Seven thousand, eight hundred and eighty-three (7,883) were referred to jobs and nine hundred and twenty-eight (928) were placed in jobs. A total of eight hundred and five (805) customers were referred to training and of those two hundred and thirty one (231), were placed in training programs.

Funding in the amount of \$218,772 was received to administer the Reemployment Services (RES) program during FY 2002, which ran from September 2001 to September 2002. Five Hundred and seventy-nine (579), UI beneficiaries/claimants were provided assessment and employment related services. Of this total, approximately 74% have re-entered the workforce either at the prior place of employment or in new occupations.

The Welfare-to-Work (WtW) program continues to provide support and job placement services to TANF recipients through two formula grants, which were awarded during 1998 and 1999 respectively. USDOL has authorized the extension of expenditures on these grants for an additional two (2) years. Of the total ninety-six (96) customers enrolled and served during this period, forty (40) were placed in unsubsidized employment with salaries ranging from \$7.00 to \$12.00 per hour.

## **STATE EVALUATION**

The State Workforce Board contracted with the University of the Virgin Islands to conduct an evaluation of the Territory's workforce investment activity. Information was also garnered through surveys conducted by an independent contractor through a Demand Occupation study. Questions were asked regarding the type of services received, the manner in which the services were offered, the

availability and timeliness of expected services, and the overall impression of the workforce investment system. These questions were asked by telephone and mail survey. System customers to include adults, dislocated workers, youth and employers were surveyed. Individuals who had never accessed the system were also interviewed to gauge their knowledge of and/or willingness to use the system should the occasion arise.

The evaluations disclosed that the employer population tended to respond more favorably to the workforce system. Responses indicated that job orders had been timely received and attended to however, job matches were deemed not to be as accurate, in a consistent manner, as they could have been. The youth and dislocated worker population responded more favorably in regards to obtaining what they expected of the system – that is jobs or job preparation. The youth who received work experience especially felt that the system was responsive to their needs.

Many dislocated workers sought to return to the position or a similar position as they had been released from. Their responses to system activities reflected their experience with the time it took for them to successfully return to the workforce.

The adult population was skeptical about what the system was expected to provide therefore did not indicate that their needs had been completely met. Many expected to obtain meaningful employment after limited contact with the system and expressed dissatisfaction with the number of steps suggested by workforce professionals whose intent was to provide a complete regimen of training and training related services based on each customer's need.

Individuals who had never accessed the system were split in their responses as to whether they would use it. Employers overwhelmingly responded that they would use the system in addition to other methods of recruiting personnel. Adults and dislocated workers generally felt that the services were not well known and that more should be done to promote what was offered. The youth were generally non-responsive in regards to impressions of the system.

Based on the survey responses, the Board has designed a "customer information", marketing campaign aimed at the non-employer customer. This campaign will be conducted through electronic and print advertising. Program specific brochures have been developed and are available at the reception areas of the workforce centers. Television and radio ads will run intermittently throughout the year describing various features of the VI Career Network. Plans are also being made with WIA partners to better define their roles within the Career Network.

For the employer population, a series of workshops and forums are being scheduled apart from the Bidder's Conference, to get feedback on ways to better

meet their workforce needs – whether by acquiring personnel or upgrading the skills of the existing labor pool.

Staff development has also been put on the front burner for One-Stop staff. Both national and local vendors have been sought to provide training on issues ranging from WIA specific procedures to conflict resolution and customer service training.

### *Conclusion*

Although there still needs to be some adjustments to System operations, Year Two of WIA authorization has been successful for the Territory. A record number of customers have received services. Core and intensive services have proved beneficial, particularly to the dislocated worker population, as it becomes understood that training is not the only option available for an individual who is out of work.

The Life Skills modules have enabled those out of work as well as those seeking work for the first time learn how to develop and prioritize their career goals. The money management and entrepreneurial modules have assisted customers to consider alternate ways of earning a living without assisted financial support.

In an economy that is still recovering from social and financial woes, the Virgin Islands Career Network has opened the door to new opportunities for individuals who would have otherwise given up on taking charge of their future. As the economy improves, the benefits of workforce development versus preparing for “a job” will be appreciated, and the workforce will stand ready to meet the dynamics of this new era.

## WIA Annual Report Data

State Name: VI

Program Year: 2001

**Table E: Dislocated Worker Program Results At-A-Glance**

	Negotiated Performance Level	Actual Performance Level	
Entered Employment Rate	40	50	31
			62
Employment Retention Rate	74	38.7	24
			62
Earnings Replacement in Six Months	93	18.3	21,329
			116,790
Employment and Credential Rate	35	16.1	10
			62

**Table M: Participation Levels**

	Total Participants Served	Total Exiters
Adults	502	336
Dislocated Workers	165	62
Older Youth	116	28
Younger Youth	363	275