

I want to welcome those of you who have never been to an employer advisory committee meeting before, and urge you to join our efforts at the PIC. I also want to thank the people who have been involved with the committee and recognize your hard work over the past four years. As a result of your efforts, we have opened three career centers, set up incumbent-worker training programs, and have begun to design welfare-to-work programs.

But we also have our work cut out for us over the next few years. As employers, many of us are facing shortages of reliable workers. And most of us realize that we have to continually upgrade the skills of our workers so that we can compete in a dynamic global economy.

Boston's economy has been changing in fundamental ways that create a growing demand for more highly-educated workers. The city enjoys strength in a number of "knowledge industries" where new technologies and processes are being applied, and which demand constant learning, flexibility, and innovation. Not the least of the reasons for this strength is our cluster of great universities, which draw the brightest from the entire world to their graduate programs. A fair percentage of the graduates stay in our region.

But in the new economy, we have come to understand that first-rate college graduates are not enough to ensure regional prosperity. Other businesses are also demanding higher-order skills for the many high-school graduates in Boston who don't go on to college. Many companies have adopted some version of "high-performance" work systems, including self-managed teams and techniques to continually improve a process. Mastery of a broader range of skills is necessary for all workers who hope to make a significant economic contribution and thereby earn an income sufficient to support a family in the years ahead.

At the PIC, we are actively engaged in designing services that help new entrants to the labor force make a more effective transition to work. We also help workers dislocated from their jobs to find new ones. Since 1990, we have been integrating work and learning for students in the Boston Public Schools. Our career centers have been working with new entrants, dislocated workers, and career changers to help them to find better jobs in the local economy. Last year, we served over 13,000 job seekers, and nearly 1,000 employers. We expect a new influx of federal dollars to help welfare recipients make the transition into the workforce, during the early part of the next year.

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The way that we design services is, first and foremost, to listen to the needs of employers. We bring you to the table to ensure that the services necessary to prepare someone for work in your company, and to sustain their employment, are in place. We continue to work closely with you throughout the process, because we cannot do our job without your active engagement. Particularly in a time of low unemployment, the task of preparing new entrants to the workforce, and staying with them to upgrade their skills, is critical for businesses.

Today you will hear from the people chairing the committees on career centers, welfare to work, and incumbent-worker training. Feel free to ask them questions, and to join us at our next round of committee meetings. There are also staff in the room, identified by their name tags, who would be happy to answer any questions you have about the PIC.

Thank you for joining us this morning, and I look forward to a fruitful collaboration.