Arkansas Workforce Systems Evaluation
Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Process Review

Introduction

In February 2011, the Kaiser Group, Inc. was hired by the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services to conduct an evaluation of the Workforce Investment System in Arkansas. The evaluation was designed to be a process review rather than a data or compliance review.
There were three primary components to the project:

- Regional Site Visits and Regional Site Reports
- A Workforce System Report
- A Workforce Center Certification Process Review

This Arkansas Workforce Center (AWC) Certification Process Review offers a field study from site visits to seven regions that gives an independent perspective on how the AWC certification process has been carried out and what impact it has had on systems improvement. In addition to the As is Review (findings), the evaluation will identify opportunities for improvement and recommendations for the AWC certification process in the future.

Methodology

During the contract period of February 1, 2011 to June 30, 2011, the Kaiser Group evaluation team visited seven workforce regions in Arkansas and eighteen Workforce centers (this was a mixture of comprehensive, satellite and affiliate centers). At each site interviews were arranged with all levels of staff from all key partner agencies. (See Appendix A). Structured interview questions were used to explore how the Certification/Recertification process was carried out in each region and the impact it had on operations and process improvement.

Our focus was not a compliance review of each local certification, but a systems review of the value, quality improvement aspects and functional application of the criteria in the certification standards. The evaluation included a review of the Business Plan, onsite review checklist with seven areas of focus, and a basic facilities and basic resource center review. Our purpose was to evaluate the certification process to date and make recommendations about the certification process going forward.

In the course of our evaluation project, certification processes in Kansas, Florida, and South Carolina were reviewed. One-Stop Operators were contacted in each state and they shared their experience with their certification processes.

Overview

Credentialing processes have become one part of the national effort to provide quality standards to One-Stop Workforce Centers. The diversity of these credentialing processes is due in large part to the fact that the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) (1998) assigns the responsibility of evaluation to individual states. Common key features of these Certification systems include:

- an organizational structure reflecting mission and purpose
- identified core values and principles
- performance standards based on values and principles
- a detailed framework for self-assessment
- a third-party review system
- written feedback
- technical assistance and training

It seems most appropriate that these common factors be applied to any effective and comprehensive evaluation of Workforce Centers and workforce development programs. Since WIA allows each state to evaluate and establish One-Stop Certification criteria you will find that there are different emphasis on certification processes among states.

In most states the certification process consists of a certification checklist that focuses on the compliance aspects for certification. An example is the checklist that the State of Florida uses to certify the One-Stops in Florida. This checklist ensures that the minimum standards are met in all One-Stops across the state. (http://www.floridajobs.org/PDG/Monitor/xls/0708_OS_CredRvwToolFinal_121907.xls)

In other states, like South Carolina, they also provide a checklist for certification but the checklist also incorporates a quality aspect to ensure that the customer's needs are met and that there is a value to the services being provided. (www.workforcesouthcarolina.com/.../osc_sc_draft_team_charter.doc)

In states like Kansas, the certification process is handled by the compliance checklist process. In addition to the compliance checklist, a quality component is added through a review of the performance aspects of the one-stop. (http://kwpolicies.kansascommerce.com/ArchivedPolicies/Archived Policies/3-06-00 State Certification for One-Stop Workforce Centers.doc)

In all the reviews of certification processes the one lacking aspect is verifiable data on the satisfaction of customers. In most cases the meeting of customers' expectations is indicated but the requirement for a standardized way of measuring this satisfaction is lacking.

Arkansas has developed a comprehensive checklist and review that focuses on process, compliance, and quality and incorporates many of the key features indicated earlier. The Arkansas certification process is one of the few certification processes that includes a Business Plan aspect. This process, when implemented properly, is critical to ensuring the continuous improvement of the One-Stop Centers.

To be a certified One-Stop Workforce Center each One-Stop Center must meet the minimum level of requirements as outlined in a checklist. Although each One-Stop Center will be different, including different partners, staffing patterns, a different customer base, different goals and directives, there is a minimum level of services that is common to each certified Comprehensive (full service) Center and affiliated sites. The certification of One Stop Centers must consider performance outcomes, including customer satisfaction, and incorporate continuous improvement processes.

The 2009 Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Criteria source document can be found at: http://www.state.ar.us/esd/AWIB/pdfs/certification_criteria09.pdf.

Purpose of Certification

"The goal of this process is to develop a world-class Workforce Center network that goes well beyond the minimal requirements established by the Federal Workforce Investment Act. It is critical to make the centers user friendly and attractive, creating a public image that is inviting to job seekers, education seekers, and employers seeking skills and talent in the local labor markets.

This Arkansas Workforce System Evaluation brings all the tools approved by the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board (WIB) into a single reference for Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB) members involved in certifying or recertifying local Arkansas Workforce Centers. It is the intent of the Arkansas WIB to provide this instrument as a guide to what is expected, not to provide the means of how it is to be accomplished. Ongoing organizing, implementation, and ensuring continuous improvement of the local certification process are the responsibility of the local WIB." (AWC Certification Criteria p.4)

The Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Criteria was initially developed and used in 2004 by LWIBs and results were validated by the State of Arkansas (DWS). The criteria was revised and used to certify and recertify centers in 2009. It is important to note that the intent of the Certification process is not just about a one-time designation.

It was designed to be an ongoing process that keeps all parties involved and achieving at high performance levels. As such, the certification process also allows for achieving excellence standards as continuous improvement planning occurs. If the certification process is implemented following these guidelines it will serve as an opportunity to continually re-examine, improve, and revise procedures to ensure that the Arkansas Workforce Development system is a primary asset in Arkansas' economic growth.

The development of the AWC system has clearly benefited from the initial 2004 Certification process and the revised criteria and Recertification process of 2009. Since 2009 progress has continued, but the existing certification process lags behind what the AWC system needs today.

Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Process Review – Systems Report

This review will follow the format of the AWC Certification Criteria as it is found in the revised 2009 document. The State of Arkansas was divided into 10 local workforce investment areas based on common geographic and economic factors. Each area contains at least one Comprehensive Center, and may have other Affiliate and Satellite Centers as part of local access networks connected to the comprehensive sites. As stated in the methodology section, this process review included site visits to seven regions and 18 separate Centers and reflects the cumulative analysis of those visits.

Under the oversight of the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board, which is now incorporated into the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services (DWS), Arkansas Workforce Centers in communities throughout the State integrate multiple workforce development programs and resources.

The goal is to make them available to individuals at the "street level" through a user-friendly delivery system. It was envisioned that the local Arkansas Workforce Centers would be designed by employers for employers, to help find and train qualified workers, and assist qualified workers to find jobs in business and industry.

Two concepts are key to the operational implementation of this vision:

- The "no wrong door" approach to providing services that encompasses the principles of universal access, integration, co-location, collaboration, and performance as the building blocks to the system. With the "no wrong door" philosophy, when a customer approaches any Arkansas Workforce Center partner requesting assistance with employment and training needs or services in support of the customer's job search or skill development, the customer is able to access the best mix of services from the combined menu of all partners' resources, and gain immediate access to the appropriate next step.

- Simplifying the maze of current programs into a comprehensive, streamlined system of services for job seekers and employers, eliminating the need to visit different locations and understand multiple, complex program requirements. In the process, local One-Stop Center leaders would work to ensure that public resources are targeted and coordinated toward clearly identified customer needs.

These concepts seem especially critical in 2011 as the State of Arkansas, like many States, faces high numbers of job seekers in need of services while Federal resources are being reduced. The recent recession has strained the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system and the publicly-funded workforce system is in the midst of responding to the most severe recession in decades. It is important to understand this context as the evaluation team reports the findings in this review.

The following were the regions visited during the evaluation and the dates of the most recent Certification/Recertification Criteria review for each that were reviewed by our team.

18 Sites Visited		
Comprehensive = 8	Satellite = 7	Affiliate = 3
Eastern Region – November 2009 • West Memphis – Comprehensive • Forrest City – Comprehensive	**Little Rock – October 2009** • Little Rock – Comprehensive	
Northeast Region – May 2009 • Jonesboro – Comprehensive • Paragould – Satellite	**Northwest Region – May 2009** • Harrison – Comprehensive • Fayetteville – Satellite	
Southeast Region – May 2009 • Dumas - Comprehensive • Pine Bluff (Tennessee Street) – Satellite • Pine Bluff (28th Street) - Satellite • Pine Bluff (UAPB) – Affiliate	**Southwest Region – May 2009** • Camden – Comprehensive • Magnolia – Satellite • Texarkana – Satellite • Lewisville – Affiliate	
West Central Region – May 2009 • Hot Springs – Comprehensive • Morillton – Satellite • Perryville – Affiliate		

The review process looked at each area of the Arkansas Workforce Center Certification Criteria, the current implementation of those standards, and the impact of those standards on day to day operations and process improvements.

Overall Certification Process

Findings

The initial Certification moved the system forward toward a set of standards to operate as the Arkansas Workforce Centers. The core standards and checklists to comply were generally understood and even though the review process was handled by LWIBs and a small number of partner managers there is evidence in each of the regions that the process had a positive impact. This will be pointed out in the seven criteria areas.

The Arkansas Workforce Investment Board (AWIB), Department of Workforce Services, (DWS), the Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIB), and the One-Stop Operators, are not on the same page at this point in time as to the purpose, value, process and structure of the Certification/Recertification Criteria. The Recertification process in 2009 and using the excellence standards as it was intended, as an ongoing system improvements process, has not gained traction.

Opportunities for Improvement

The Recertification process as it is laid out in the criteria needs to be revisited and expanded from a narrow WIA/LWIB perspective to one that has practical value and meaning for all primary partners. The AWC system is at a key opportunity point; a crossroads where important system wide decisions need to be made.

For the AWCs to move beyond the core standards towards excellence standards that are active, meaningful, embraced by AWC partners, and contribute to process improvement, will take a revised Certification Criteria and process for the future. The vast majority of leaders we interviewed in the seven regions do not see significant value in Recertifying AWCs with the existing process.

The initial criteria form a good foundation and are effective for initial AWC Comprehensive Site Certification. For the Comprehensive Centers already certified, the process to Recertify them every two years has not evolved with the development of the AWCs.

Certification Review - Business Plans

For an Arkansas Workforce Center to be considered for Certification, the One-Stop Operator, with the mandated and optional partners, is required to jointly prepare Arkansas Workforce Center Business Plans. The Business Plan will identify the available products and services, the organizational structure, an operational and financial plan including cost allocations based on square footage, staff development training, marketing strategies, and other related information necessary to operate an Arkansas Workforce Center. The review and approval of that plan by the LWIB will ensure the avoidance of duplication of services and provide for the inclusion of partners.

Findings

The Business Plans available for our review had all been published, along with the reviews of the Certification Criteria, between May and November of 2009. While it is difficult to assess the degree to which these documents were dynamic, "living documents" since the criteria for doing so are somewhat subjective, there were some very clear patterns our evaluation of the Business Plans and the current process uncovered.

First, it was clear from our interviews that only a small number of people in each region had produced the Business Plans, and that a similarly small number of staff are currently aware the Business Plan exists.

Second, it was quite common for LWIB/One-Stop Operator management staff to be the primary partners in a region that actually wrote the Business Plan. While there were some exceptions to this, the overall impression from our observations was that the Business Plan was primarily a onetime event. Consequently, the Business Plans come to have a LWIB/One-Stop Operator focus despite their collective attempts to be broadly drawn and inclusive of everyone in the AWCs. They also lacked the process improvement impact that a regularly reviewed and updated Business Plan can have on a service system.

Third, a number of the Business Plans were organized and laid out matching the categories and criteria as presented in the Certification Criteria, and in so doing became more of a series of statements intended to explain how the Center was meeting the standards as outlined in the Certification Criteria rather than a plan that could be followed or used to guide the work of staff.

Finally, a few contained outdated references to DWS or to contractors that were no longer in place; others included MOUs that had been signed by partners as long ago as 2001. This is not to say that MOUs must be revisited each year, or that new MOU documents should be prepared every year. Our evaluation is that all of the above

contribute to the observation that the business planning process is an exercise in meeting the Certification Criteria standards much more than it is something that really represents and documents a dynamic planning process.

Many of the leadership staff that were involved in the development of the Business Plan identified the process as providing a valuable framework or starting point for partners to align on a clear vision for the AWCs and a structure to shape their collaboration. Others approached it as simply a requirement of the Certification process. Even in many of those cases where it was done to meet the requirement rather than an active process improvement tool it was apparent the philosophy and key concepts of the Certification Criteria had been absorbed and were being used.

The Certification review process done by the LWIBs did not, in any significant way, look at the quality of the Business Plan and its successful implementation. It checked off that the plan was completed and in place. It was rare for us to find a Business Plan that had been revisited and updated since 2009.

✶✶✶ Opportunities for Improvement

From project conversations with LWIB/One-Stop Operator staff and the evaluation team's own experience, we know that a considerable amount of planning occurs towards the end of one program year in preparation for the program year to follow.

> This planning is primarily program focused. If the model of the AWC is to progress, there also needs to be business planning for the collaborative partnership. The Business Plans as presented, address the content that the Certification Criteria defines as important, but they do not represent the actual planning that every region undoubtedly does and must do in preparation for the new program year.

One possibility would be to amend the Recertification Criteria so that the standards for Business Plans state that regions should simply document the planning they are already doing for their next program year. This change would ensure that the meaningfulness of regional Business Plans is derived from what is actually planned to occur. Such a change would set the stage for future business planning to include a review of the prior year's plan showing planned against actual goals. Implementing this concept would require collaboration as this type of AWC Business Plan would need to accommodate different program years (i.e. calendar year versus fiscal year).

Including such a review as an integral part of the business planning process provides regions the opportunity to not only document the plan for the next program year, but to incorporate the experience from the program year just completed. This is a process that

more closely resembles what successful workforce development regions do as a matter of course, and what we believe the regions in Arkansas are now doing since the overall level of success is high. This recommendation brings the Certification Criteria more into alignment with what is actually done.

This would also involve wider participation from partner organizations, and move the Region closer to the original process improvement purpose for the Business Plan.

The AWC Certification Criteria (page 24) lays out pretty clear expectations for Centers. Items in Section II of the Certification Criteria (excellence standards) will be rated as documentation of progress toward excellence. It is anticipated that the standards in this section will become part of the baseline standards for Recertification.

The intent of the certification process was for the LWIB to discuss progress toward meeting all of these standards during its ongoing quality review discussions throughout the certification period. This process is less dynamic and has had less impact than planned.

This is an inconsistent part of the leadership process in most regions and needs to be reviewed and modified to add value and to become a regular part of an AWC system review that targets process improvement from a collective perspective (all partners, not just WIA).

While the Certification Criteria are focused on individual Workforce Centers, the Business Plan component of the Certification process is the natural tool for regional planning and tying the AWCs together as a workforce system.

The current planning processes active in the AWCs are primarily program focused and that reality will limit the ability of partner agencies to move the service integration and One-Stop collaborative model beyond the current successes that have been achieved.

There are a variety of models that could be followed for the next generation of Business Plans that actually do focus on ongoing system improvement. One example of a Business Process Review is included. (See Appendix B)

Certification Review - Defining the Business

Findings

If there were only one characteristic that would collectively describe how the regional Business Plans defined the business, it would be that it was described largely in WIA terms.

It is also clear from the definition of the business that what is being described is the typical WIA sequence of events – **core services** for everyone; **intensive services** for those who are eligible and qualify for assistance and who are not successful with finding employment through self-service activities, and **training** available for those who are eligible and qualify who have not succeeded with finding employment through intensive services. Not often mentioned are UI services, public labor exchange (Employment Services) and work registration, or TANF (TEA and Work Pays) services, all of which when taken together describe the bulk of the work that is performed in the AWCs.

> The full integration of UI customers as dislocated/unemployed job seekers and connecting them to all possible services is a systems challenge that all AWC partners need to embrace.

The challenge that the Certification standards present in this section is for the AWC leadership to creatively and proactively look at "what the core business of the center is and where it fits into the market place." That is a tall order when you do not see yourself as a single business! Is it really realistic for a multiple agency collaborative of public and private partners "to collectively operate as a single business with multiple investors in a joint venture?" (AWC Certification Criteria p. 25)

Many regions are trying and have made progress toward the One-Stop Business model as it is understood. This progress makes sense to those staff and leaders who see the AWC vision as being better for customers and their communities. But without a further refinement of the Certification Criteria as it is currently structured, additional progress will be difficult.

In some States the commitment to the One-Stop Workforce Center models has faded (starting with top leadership) and partners begin to pull out when the benefit is unclear. In other States new models for fully integrated One-Stop Centers have advanced. The lack of clear reauthorization legislation for both TANF and WIA contributes to the problem. Arkansas still has a clear state commitment to the One-Stop model but it needs continual reinforcement and support at all levels.

Opportunities for Improvement

The opportunity here is for the Business Plan to help partners define their shared customers and common business strategies. It can also be an active document that promotes meaningful regional planning and identifies strategies to improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of all partner agencies' workforce services. A Quarterly Business Review (QBR) process would help make it a dynamic process improvement tool.

There are initiatives moving forward. For example, the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (ETA) just released a report encouraging states to explore expanded Unemployment Insurance (UI) and workforce system connectivity. As part of this response, the Department of Labor, ETA, and state and local workforce agencies are collaborating to implement new and innovative reemployment strategies to better connect UI claimants with the larger publicly-funded workforce system. This is being accomplished using regular formula funds including Workforce Investment Act funds, Employment Services funds, as well as additional sources.
(http://www.workforceatm.org/sections/pdf/2010/UI_Connectivity_Baseline_Final_Report_20101018.pdf?CFID=1448586&CFTOKEN=56795742)

Arkansas is in an excellent position, with the current vision of DWS and the onsite contact with UI customers at the AWCs, to be a national leader in connecting UI to the workforce system. Fully integrating UI into the AWCs and expanding the Workforce Specialist position as a cross trained staff. This means UI staff must go beyond issuing benefits and help move customers toward reemployment.

Certification Review – Products and Services

Findings

"The center describes its set of products and services to the public as a "menu of services" for a single business operation, not a menu of separate organizations operating under one roof." (AWC Certification Criteria p. 26)

This is an area that many of the regions have done very well in. The best examples all promote the AWC brand and use a variety of formats (internet directory, power point presentations on the flat screen monitors in the customer areas, brochures, and other handouts.) The resources available in the resource room have been upgraded in many areas and the tools available to staff and customers for career exploration, job search and onsite job readiness development are growing. The challenge is to make better use of all the tools available.

A widespread effort in many regions to expand partnerships and the range of services available to customers is a key element in the One-Stop integrated services model. There is progress system wide in this area.

While the emphasis on quality customer service and meeting customer needs clearly was consistent, staff interviews revealed that quantified customer service standards are not in place consistently across regions.

AWCs are charged with being demand driven and reflecting customer input while offering customer choice. The reality for most service staff is that services are program driven with different program requirements that make it difficult to connect customers to resources they may need but do not qualify to use.

This standard has had an impact on operations and it has helped move the AWCs toward seeing and responding to customers in a more holistic manner. Cross training has increased and the ability to shift staff resources to meet demand is evident to some degree in each region visited.

Opportunities for Improvement

Employers as a major customer group get less focus than job seekers. The standards could be more specific about minimum services focused on employers.

Setting the criteria so that online service directories become the norm seems like a natural step to take, and makes better use of existing technology. Camden is nearly ready to implement theirs and could be used as a model in other regions.

Certification Review – Marketing

This is a challenging area for the AWCs and a difficult area for our evaluation team to review because there's been no way to measure the impact of marketing. The standards have impacted operations significantly in that the majority of staff doing any kind of outreach promote the AWC brand to the community.

This progress has been made without much in the way of AWC funds specific to marketing. DWS supplies most of the brand marketing materials and is launching a statewide campaign that regions need to build on and incorporate into local marketing efforts. The most effective marketing was described by staff as networking and community involvement.

Opportunities for Improvement

The AWCs have not focused on marketing approaches to attract targeted customer groups. The high volume in most centers has strained resources and negated the need to recruit job seekers. Better tracking and consistent reporting on customers served across regions would be helpful to provide an accurate measure of total AWC impact on the communities they serve.

Customers often come to the center for a specific purpose and often leave with a menu of services that shifts their image of the site from "Unemployment Office" to Reemployment Center.

Certification Review – Management and Organizational Structure

Findings

This criteria area, the intent, and the standards set to be certified, need to be reviewed and discussed to clarify and further define several key aspects. One is the role of the Center Manager/One-Stop Operator. Page nine of the Certification criteria states "it is the responsibility of the local WIB to select a One-Stop Operator. They may select a single operator for each site." This is an area that needs clarification. Throughout the state, the One-Stop Operator is the WIA provider, but the functional role of the Center Manager and who that Center Manager is, is often <u>not clear</u>. DWS has a dominant role in most regions by being the funding source, the lease holder, and the largest partner in terms of staff and customers. This at times overshadows the One-Stop Operator's role.

There were many sites visited where leadership has created a positive working environment and staff were expressing confidence in the AWCs and the services offered, but there was no evidence of staff customer satisfaction surveys as the criteria call for, other than informal observation. Climate surveys have been used at Workforce Centers around the country to offer staff a chance to have a voice in their Workforce Centers.

Opportunities for Improvement

Clarify the standards on Center management and offer several models to allow for either a clear One-Stop Operator as Center Manager or a more collaborative co-managed team leadership model that now exists in many regions.

Clarify the difference between a regional AWC Manager that functions as a regional AWC system manager and a site manager that manages a single Center.

Encourage "climate surveys" to benchmark the AWC staff attitudes toward the service design, facilities, leadership, etc, at comprehensive sites. This has been an effective tool for Workforce Centers around the country. The Kaiser Group could provide models upon request.

Certification Review – Operational Plan

Findings

The standards for this area call for a clearly designed customer flow, referral process and staffing model to cover shared services and peak service demands. The standards have been actively met in most regions and the criteria have helped provide a framework for site and regional collaboration.

Center wide policies and procedures were not effectively developed in most regions and even in Hot Springs where they are in place, they were not actively known by all staff. If this criteria is deemed important, then it needs wider ownership by partners and periodic review. In other Workforce Centers around the country where center policies and procedures are actively in place, they add value. Particularly where different organizations have different work rules, holidays, dress codes, etc, the AWC needs an agreed upon structure to reduce tensions among employees and to reinforce the AWCs as "employer" rather than individual agencies.

Opportunities for Improvement

Technology is a big part of AWC development in 2011 and the AWCs do not have a cohesive IT plan, nor does DWS as a whole. Most responded to the criteria by identifying what WIA did and what DWS was responsible for, but collective proactive planning to maximize all available technology resources is needed.

Certification Review – Measuring Success

Findings

This area of the standards needs revision or enforcement. The evidence used to justify meeting some of the key standards were below the intent or very vague.

"The plan describes quantified and measurable goals for the center as a whole and plans to ensure the goals are accomplished." Our field work found very few Center wide measurable goals and little or no awareness of partner goals. Therefore there was also little in the way of strategies to identify how partners can assist each other in meeting their organizational and funding outcome targets.

Opportunities for Improvement

As is discussed in more detail in the other reports in this evaluation, three things are needed related to strengthening the Certification Criteria in this category.

1. A regional performance profile that the AWC can use to report to all stakeholders on AWC success.
2. Quarterly discussion and sharing of performance data between programs at all levels.
3. Specific strategies to efficiently share resources and have a positive impact on all partner outcomes.

Certification Review – Financial Plan

Findings

In this area, the Certification Criteria need clear definition as to what's meant by a unified Center budget. WIA and DWS programs have programmatic budgets for each site, but there was no evidence of a unified Center budget as the Criteria describe.

Also, while there are many great examples of collaboration, resource sharing, and coordination to stretch funding and avoid duplication, partners do not collectively seek revenue in many cases we identified.

There are many examples nationwide of Centers generating revenue through grant applications, fee for service, foundations, etc. As resources get tighter and customer needs for services expand, the AWC brand and the collective value to the community of partner services, offered in an integrated model has the potential to generate revenue.

Opportunities for Improvement

The Criteria in the excellence standards call for nontraditional fund development. "Center manager has established strategy for fund development beyond traditional government sources." This standard needs to be given a higher priority. However, until effective accountability is clearly established with the One-Stop manager or leadership team, it is unlikely that additional revenues will be generated.

Certification Review – Basic Facility Review

As a part of our site visits, the Kaiser Evaluation Team reviewed the Basic Facility Review Checklist for the larger sites we visited. The major question that arose is what constitutes compliance. There is a subjective aspect to some of the criteria that left whether to check yes or no a little in the grey area. It appears this was an effective tool for the initial Certification process, but for those sites being Recertified in 2009, it is difficult to tell how rigorous the validation was by reviewers. At the Comprehensive AWCs reviewed, most AWCs did not meet 5-7 of the 20 Criteria (See Appendix C for these Criteria). The completed checklists for each region are included in each Regional Site Report.

For this standard to be meaningful, it needs to be reviewed locally at least twice a year. If staff are inconsistent in wearing AWC nametags, or the menu of services is not posted or up to date, you do not want to wait two years for Recertification before corrections are made.

Certification Review – Resource Room Review

The Resource Rooms are an important service component to the AWC model. The no wrong door approach requires some easily accessible, partially self directed services for the large numbers of customers that flow through many of the AWCs. The Resource Room is often staffed by multiple agencies, and can be a gateway to more intensive services. When used properly, it is a very cost effective service and is a high priority area for quality assurance and process improvement.

The Certification criteria currently in place are <u>very basic</u> and Recertification needs an updated more in depth tool to use in the process. As in the Basic Facility Review, our review of the checklist criteria for Comprehensive sites visited showed all but one had areas that did not meet the Criteria, from two of eleven to eight of eleven criteria not met (See Appendix D for these Criteria). The completed checklists for each region are included in each Regional Site Report.

This standard also needs to be reviewed at least twice a year.

Recommendations for a Future Certification Review Process for Arkansas Workforce Centers

The following recommendations are designed as options for Arkansas Workforce System leaders to use in planning system improvements for 2011 and beyond. The Workforce Systems Report that summarizes our field work is a companion document that adds detail and background to these recommendations. The Arkansas Workforce Center Certification review criteria of 2009 needs a 2011 revision to continue to move the AWC brand forward towards the vision that the AWIB, and DWS under Director Artee Williams, have created.

Recommendation #1

The AWC Certification Process has to move beyond a simple checklist and add more value for ongoing Recertification of Centers. **The criteria needs to be updated by a partner workgroup with the focus on the full implementation of the Business Plan and excellence standards such as:**

- The standards reflect process improvement areas that matter to local leaders and are reviewed quarterly in a Quarterly Business Review process (QBR).

- Local areas use existing partner meetings and planning processes to target AWC goals and outcomes (not just program goals and outcomes) that benefit customers.

Note: This workgroup would include leaders from DWS, LWIBs, One-Stop Operators and other locally chosen primary partners. They would convene between July and September 2011 and issue new Certification guidelines by October 1, 2011.

Recommendation #2

The revised Certification/Recertification of 2011 needs to clarify the One-Stop Operator/Team Leadership options and expectations for how that leadership will advance the role of AWCs in meeting Arkansas regional workforce needs.

Collaborative leadership aligned on a common vision is the single most important component to AWC service integration and success. Current WIA federal legislation calls for a significant role for the WIA/One-Stop provider selected by the LWIB. This public/private partnership is thriving in several regions visited in our field work and

struggling in others. This new leadership Certification Criteria needs to set minimum requirements for AWC collaborative leadership. If the minimum requirements are not met, LWIBs/DWS needs to take corrective action.

Recommendation #3

The 2011 revision of the AWC Certification Criteria needs to include a focus on gathering, analyzing, and using systematic customer feedback. This should include feedback from job seekers, employers, and AWC staff and partners (as internal customers). Key to this standard being effective will be the documentation of improvement strategies based on customer feedback and the shifting of resources to meet customer demand.

Recommendation #4

There could be an incentive or quality rating system to distinguish AWCs that document measurable success in key areas. It is important to more clearly show how the AWCs contribute to economic growth, impact individual lives, and turn the investment of Federal dollars in the communities they serve into workforce development improvements.

Appendix

Appendix A – On-Site Interviews Completed

On-Site Interviews Completed (When staff had multiple job functions, the primary job function was chosen.)

Region	LWIB Director/ Staff/ Member	AOC	Center Manager	DWS Man/Site Manager	WIA Man/ Sup	TEA Sup	UI Sup	Bus. Serv. Rep	Vet. Rep	WIA CM /Staff	TEA/Work Pays CM	UI Staff	Resource Room Staff	Partner Staff	Total
Eastern (Forrest City, West Memphis)	1		1	2	1	2				2	3			3	15
Little Rock	1	1		2	3	1		1		2	2			3	16
Southeast (Pinebluff, Dumus)	2		1	2	2	1	1			3	2	1	4	2	21
Northwest (Fayetteville, Harrison)	3	1	1	2	2	1	2		2	2	2		2	4	24
Southwest (Camden, Magnolia, Lewisville, Texarkana)			1	2	4					2	2	1	1		13
West Central (Hot Springs)	1		1	1			1	1	1	3	2		1	3	15
Northeast (Jonesboro, Paragould)	1	1		2	1	1	1		1	2	1		1	2	14
Totals	9	3	5	13	13	6	5	2	4	16	14	2	9	17	118

Appendix B – Sample Business Process Review

One-Stop Framework Self-Assessment by One-Stop Sites

Criteria	Benchmarks	Capacity of Current Site to Reach the Desired Status
One-Stop Environment (facility)	• Professional Atmosphere • Customer friendly layout • Maximum use of space • Adequate technology	The points listed in the desired status provide greater description of each of the criteria. For each of the criteria, please assess the following:
Upfront Services and Resource Room	• Accurate tracking of customers • Seamless, integrated services using all partner resources • Central "help desk" with information to guide customer choice • Adequate "resources" in resource room	
Employer Services/Business Service Teams	• Establish a coordinated employer contact system • Develop an interagency marketing plan • Standardize core business processes • Use a common data base • Establish single points of contact (Employer Account Reps) • Set system performance goals and share job leads	1. Where the one-stop is now on a continuum from the initial one-stop design to meeting the Benchmarks?
Customer Focus & Continuous Improvement	• Coordinated customer satisfaction data that is timely, shared with partners and used to improve services (Employers and Job Seekers) • Common Customer Service Standards	2. What is possible: how close to the Benchmarks can the current location get?
Teamwork & Service Integration	• Operationalize seamless service design to customers • Cross training and service collaboration • Respond to market demand with service flexibility • Active communication and organizational alignment toward common goals	3. What general actions should be taken to reach the Benchmarks or what is possible?
Organizational Structure	• Roles and responsibilities are clear: Board-Operators-Partners-Community • Organizational structure supports strategic objectives • Site base structure supports collaboration and performance	
Performance Management and accountability	• Measurement and sharing of program performance (goals vs. actual) monthly and quarterly • System-wide critical few indicators to measure system success	

Appendix C – Basic Facility Review

Basic Facility Review

Facility Feature	Yes	No
Located on public transportation (n/a if not available)		
Common Reception Point		
Space for group services		
Private space for personal discussion		
Space for itinerant or part-time services		
Space to expand to add new partners		
Clearly posts hours of operation		
Expanded hours when warranted		
Adequate general parking and handicap parking		
Visible and prominent external signage		
Clean exterior, free of trash and weeds		
Clear and professional internal signage		
Staff wear name tags		
Staff use common logo for stationery and cards		
Site has been ADA reviewed (reference checklist cited on page 10)		
Has adequate computers available for use by general public		
Restrooms are clean and adequately supplied		
Menu of services is displayed		
Vision and mission are displayed		
Information about center performance is displayed or readily accessible		

Facility Strengths:

Facility Opportunities for Improvement:

Appendix D – Basic Resource Center Review

Basic Resource Center Review

Resource Center Feature	Yes	No
Resource area is the focal point of the center and draws customers in		
Self-help materials are readily available		
Materials are available in alternative formats for the disabled or non-English speaking		
Staff are stationed in the resource area and readily available to customers		
Resources are available for employers as well as job seekers		
Information is available in a wide array of media, including video, audio, books, periodicals, and software		
The area has appropriate signage to guide customers to resources		
The area includes capacity for customers to photocopy, print, telephone, fax, and access the internet		
There are materials appropriate for youth to use in career exploration, postsecondary selection, and financial aid assistance		
Labor market information is easily understandable and accessible		
There are tools for customers to self-assess their skills and develop resumes		

Resource Room Strengths:

Resource Room Opportunities for Improvement: