

**ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR  
TITLE I  
OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT OF 1998**



**TERRITORY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

**For the period of  
July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007**

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## THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM

As workforce development strategies change to meet a globally competitive market, the programs and services offered through the Workforce Investment System continue to be reinvented in order to establish a relationship between employer, job seeker and workforce professional that is beneficial to all. During Program Year 2006, the Virgin Islands Workforce System went through another transformation – this one designed to address the growing and changing needs of the local workforce. The System focused on three of the workforce priorities developed in the PY '05-'07 Strategic Plan namely;

- ❑ *Providing universal access to a demand-driven workforce investment system.*
- ❑ *Implementing a seamless approach to accessing graduated levels of services and programs through a multi-functional One Stop Service Delivery system.*
- ❑ *Enhancing Management Information Systems and Performance Accountability.*

In so doing, the high-growth, high-demand occupational areas of Information Technology, Construction/Industrial Maintenance, and Healthcare became the portals for new activity. New service providers were recruited in these areas who offered more than entry level training, industry-recognized credentials in skill areas became the standard for successful completion and career ladders and lattices were established in the Healthcare industry. Customers who were the most challenged received a mix of basic academic skills as well as job readiness training that qualified them for general entry level employment while still being able to access more in-depth occupational skill training that would enable them to attain better employment in the future.

As the local economic situation stabilized so did the ability of employers to focus on their most critical staffing needs. More requests for qualified workers came to the workforce system during PY'06 than previous years. The unemployment rate continued to decline as has been the pattern over the past few years. In July 2006 the Territory's unemployment rate stood at **6.2%**, with a 7.5% showing in the St. Croix district and 5.1% in the St. Thomas/St. John district. By June 2007, the Territorial unemployment rate declined even further to **5.7%**, with the district of St. Croix still posting a somewhat high 6.6% The steady tourism-based economy in the St. Thomas/St. John district maintained its showing with a 5.0% showing in that district.

## Virgin Islands Employment Statistics for Program Year 2006

	<b>Territorial</b>	<b>St. Croix</b>	<b>St. Thomas/ St. John</b>
<b>July 2006</b>	<b>6.2%</b>	7.5%	5.1%
<b>June 2007</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	6.6%	5.0%

The difference between districts has been a constant throughout the years and greatly influenced the determination of targeted development in occupational areas geared to construction, advanced manufacturing and industrial maintenance. These areas represent some of the top employers in the Territory however; skilled workers must often be imported from other Caribbean islands or the US mainland because locally available skilled craftsmen are fewer than what is in demand.

*The Cost of Business*

The WIA Title I allotment for the US Virgin Islands, in Program Year 2006 was \$2,504,885.

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>ALLOTMENT PY'06</b>	<b>ALLOTMENT PY'05</b>
<b>Youth</b>	\$ 643,072	\$ 749,311
<b>Adult</b>	\$ 688,744	\$ 787,674
<b>Dislocated Worker</b>	\$1,173,069	\$ 1,297,295
<b>TOTAL</b>	\$2,504,885	\$ 2,834,280

This allotment reflected a reduction of (-11.6%) from the allotment for program year 2005 which totaled \$2,834,280. Core, intensive and training services were adjusted to accommodate the shortfall, especially in the adult services category.

Youth Activities

The goal of most young persons who access WIA services are to attain some sort of work experience, paid or unpaid. 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 is prepared for each individual based on the assessments, customer goals and career guidance by the service representative.

During Program Year 2006, there were 243 planned enrollments for youth, including 50 out-of-school youth. There were actually 286 individuals served

during this time. Services received included summer work experience, after school tutorials for “at-risk” in school youth, life skills workshops and non summer work experience and internships. Of the \$643,072 youth allotment, \$491,950 was available for services to include all ten WIA program elements. The cost of serving youth customers averaged approximately \$1,720 per participant.

Follow up services for the required twelve-month period is administered in many forms to include mentoring, tutoring and the provision of supportive services.

Service providers offered several innovative approaches to providing a mix of the ten program elements this program year, specifically comprehensive guidance and counseling, tutoring and study skills training and leadership development opportunities.

The Virgin Islands Workforce Investment Act Youth Program provides year round services and activities for those youth most in need or “at risk” in our community. These services are offered to all youth who meet the eligibility requirements of the WIA youth program. Its intent is to provide a comprehensive package of services that address not only the educational needs of each youth but, further offers youth development activities to include career exploration, work readiness training, life skills management, growth through critical thinking, leadership development opportunities and community involvement, all within the parameters of the local demand occupations that show growth, consistency and longevity in the Territory. The anticipated outcome is the successful completion of general education, post-secondary education and entry into the world of work.

Also during PY’06 the WIB released a targeted RFP designed to provide out-of-school youth with a long-term training experience that resulted in both a high-school diploma/GED and exposure to an occupational skill. The program design was left to the service provider with specific criteria being that it was of a long duration – nine months to a year; included life experience – either work experience or community service or both; developed job readiness skills; and encouraged advanced education whether academic or technical in a local demand occupation. Follow up services for a year after completion was also required.

Service providers were cautioned that this target group would present challenges, particularly retaining their attention for such a long program and ensuring that the barriers that prevented them from initially being successful were addressed at some point (to the extent possible) during the course of the program. It was strongly recommended that guidance and career counselors be made available to help in this area.

#### *Program Spotlight*

Of the providers selected, one has been exceptional in providing all the criteria requested and more. Under the name “Project Link”, this program has

endeavored to provide a comprehensive experience for each student. Recognizing that out-of-school youth face more barriers to success than a good education, they have coupled life skills training with community service and academic training with work experience.

The students, each a high school dropout at varying levels were initially interviewed by Project Link staff for admittance to the program. This was done to set the tone for the program – one of commitment and excellence. Those who were successful began their journey with a series of workshops geared at self-assessment. They were taught to think and operate as a team with each one, if not responsible, at least aware of the others situation and challenged to encourage each other to participate fully in the yearlong program. They were taught about diversity and overcoming individual barriers and were asked to commit to the program but more so, commit to changing their lives. Next, they were all given community service projects which proved difficult for most and impossible for some. Two weeks into their projects, most had reverted to prior behaviors and stopped attending classes and/or community projects. Project Link staff were faced with the dilemma as to whether to continue programming or get out before any more time and energy was expended on what appeared to be a failed program. They persevered however, and with the assistance of a WIA youth counselor were able to locate the students, discuss their individual situations with them and help them re-focus and re-commit to Project Link.

The students returned and the program continues. They spend their mornings in class working on a high school diploma program and their afternoons in work experience at various locations in the community. To date, only one student had to be expelled from the program. The leaders of Project Link have noted that though each day with the students is a challenge and they are still unsure of what the final outcome will be, they have seen growth in each one of their students. Those who are pregnant or parenting have learned and have continued access to parenting skills; those who have anger management issues have access to professional counseling; those who never thought an education was the key to achieving dreams have had an opportunity to reconsider due to new doors opening in their lives. Project Link still has several months in its year-long program to go, but is a living example of how customer focused youth programs developed using the WIA-based tenets for serving the most at-risk youth make a difference in a young person's life. It is a program to watch and one that can be a model for future targeted programs of this type in the future.

### Adults and Dislocated Workers

A total of \$1,861,813 was allotted to the adults and dislocated workers program for PY'06. After statewide and local administration costs were determined there was \$526,889 available for program operation for adults and \$712,586 for

dislocated workers. \$175,960 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.

Due to reduced funding the system anticipated serving three hundred (300) customers through Individual Training Accounts during the program year. By June 2007, two hundred and sixty-two customers had been served.

<b>CUSTOMERS</b>	<b>ST. THOMAS/ ST. JOHN</b>	<b>ST. CROIX</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Adults	70	133	203
Dislocated Workers	24	35	59
<b>TOTAL</b>	94	168	262

Many of the customers served were interested in acquiring intermediate to advanced credentials in Information Technology, from front-end user operations to back end maintenance and repair. This was true in both districts and translated into job opportunities in the hotels, restaurants and retail shops as well as bank clerks and general office personnel. Another high interest training area was in the construction/industrial maintenance field. Courses offered here range from welding and pipefitting to electrical and fiber optics.

A healthcare ladder/lattice is being developed with entry-level Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes offered by several service providers. Successful completers who desire to continue in the healthcare field can thereafter follow up with a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) course, which is more rigorous, and time intensive. The LPN classes are conducted by the local hospitals in both districts – on St. Croix it is a joint operation with the Career and Technical School. Those who successfully complete the LPN course and pass the national testing have access at the University level to continue on to become a registered nurse (RN). New to the workforce system are courses in medical transcription and medical coding which will be offered online. The target audience for this program is dislocated workers although adults and older youth who are eligible will also have access to the classes.

A mainstay of the workforce system has been the basic skills and soft skills courses. Although offered by different service providers either as a single unit or in conjunction with an occupational skill, two operations are noteworthy because they are offered by neighborhood based community organizations. Customers do not have to travel far to access basic academic classes such as basic math and language skills, soft skills such as dressing for work and telephone etiquette and in one location English as a Second Language (ESL). These customers often express that the comfort level of being around peers in a “not so traditional” classroom setting takes away the nervousness associated with going back to school after being away for a long time.

The customer's Individual Service Strategy (ISS) determines the amount of each ITA and each customer works with his/her counselor to ensure that all his or her needs are met in a cost effective manner. Expenditures for Program Year 2006 are as follows:

DOLLARS	ST. THOMAS/ ST. JOHN	ST. CROIX	TOTAL
Adults	\$103,002.59	\$244,882.45	\$347,885.04
Dislocated Workers	\$ 28,794.55	\$ 62,631.70	\$ 91,426.25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$131,797.14</b>	<b>\$307,514.15</b>	<b>\$439,311.29</b>

On average, each customer's training voucher amounted to \$1677 and each customer accessed at least one intensive service in addition to the completion of the ISS before training occurred.

As in last program year, there was a greater demand for core and intensive services to dislocated workers than 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.

### One-Stop Partner Activities

Funding for the Employment Service or Wagner-Peyser activities for PY'06 was \$1,374,641 a reduction of (-4.18%) from the previous program year. Four Thousand, Nine Hundred and Ninety (4,990) customers accessed services this year. Four Hundred and Forty-four (444) received career guidance while seventeen hundred and twenty-five (1,725) took advantage of job search activities. Approximately five hundred and four (504) individuals received WIA services. A total of two thousand, seven hundred and fifty (2,750) individuals were referred to jobs.

Services to veterans' yielded one hundred and twenty-three (123) total new veteran job seekers applications between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007. Fifty-three (53) took part in job search activities while seventy-seven (77) were referred to employment. Eleven (11) individuals were referred to WIA services and four (4) participated in training activities.

### **STATE EVALUATION**

By adhering to the national call for targeting high-growth, high-demand occupations for job development and training under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the Virgin Islands Workforce Investment System has provided

career building opportunities in demand occupations to individuals in the community who had previously not thought about work in terms of a career. By providing core services that stimulate discovery and intensive services that help build a workable plan of action, each customer can create a mix of services suitable to their individual situation. Training offered by eligible providers who are experts in their field give customers a hands on, real life learning experience and not simply classroom training.

As the employment landscape evolves and more demands are made on the workforce system to produce work ready individuals that are literate, skilled and prepared for the workforce, the system is charged with reinventing the way services are provided to the community. In PY'06, staff members were engaged in development activities that allowed them to look beyond the customary practices and attempt new methods of serving the customer. Procedures that had been put in place a few years earlier were refined and updated to meet current customer demand. New software packages were adopted that will enable the customer to participate in facilitated group workshops or self directed sessions in job readiness skills while freeing other staff to engage in more one-on-one discussions with the hardest to serve customers.

Staff development opportunities also took place during various workshops and training sessions on island and on the mainland and refresher courses on the local WIA reporting system, America's One Stop Operation System were held as system upgrades became available.

The VI Workforce Investment Board, with new membership in PY'06, participated in board development sessions that allowed them to revisit the goals of the workforce system. By focusing on aligning demand occupations with training opportunities the Board has begun the shift to sector development within its target growth areas. In so doing, the Board efforts at using talent development to increase economic competitiveness are translating into a shift in service delivery methods. Additionally, board staff this year participated as a 'learner' in the National Business Learning Partnership Round Two (NBLP-2), which provided exposure to the best practices of other workforce areas who have already successfully transitioned to workforce practices that drive regional economic competitiveness.

As the VI Workforce system grows in concert with regional economic development it is anticipated that the types of training will become even more aligned with employer demand in the Territory. Initially, fewer customers (specifically adults) may receive training services however; as the momentum for targeted development grows so will the opportunities for building careers. As customers see that upwardly mobile careers are attainable, it is further anticipated that there will be an increase in the usage of the Territory's workforce services. Youth coming in at the ground floor will benefit most from the new direction, as they will start building careers from the onset.