

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 3-10
	DATE August 9, 2010

TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
 STATE WORKFORCE ADMINISTRATORS
 STATE AND LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD
 CHAIRS and DIRECTORS
 STATE LABOR COMMISSIONERS
 STATE RAPID RESPONSE COORDINATORS

FROM: JANE OATES /s/
 Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: The National Rapid Response Initiative

1. Purpose. To announce the National Rapid Response Initiative, a comprehensive, collaborative effort to promote consistent, high quality, timely and innovative responses to economic transition across the country. Through this Initiative, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) will collaborate with state and local Rapid Response practitioners and partners to assess the current system capacity, identify areas for improvement, and provide training and technical assistance to support the system in addressing the identified needs.

2. Background. Rapid Response is a required state function under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), funded by reserving up to 25 percent of the state's WIA Dislocated Worker (DW) allotment. Rapid Response acts as both a provider of direct reemployment services and as a facilitator of additional services and resources. It is carried out by states and local workforce development organizations in partnership with One-Stop Career Centers. Rapid Response arranges for the provision of support services such as unemployment insurance, health care, home heating assistance, legal aid, financial advice, and other forms of critical assistance to affected workers and communities.

Rapid Response is a primary gateway to the workforce system for both dislocated workers and employers. While some proactive Rapid Response approaches have been successful in lessening or averting layoffs around the country, traditionally Rapid Response has focused on serving workers at the time of layoff announcement and providing information and resources that help them transition to new employment. Rapid Response also provides critical services to employers by helping them manage transition and their workforce challenges.

Rapid Response provides immediate, on-site services for workers and employers upon notice of layoffs and plant closures, and works to minimize the impacts of those layoffs by helping workers obtain new employment as quickly as possible.

3. The Rapid Response Initiative.

a. Why A Rapid Response Initiative?

Early intervention services provided through Rapid Response offer workers affected by downsizing the best chance to re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible. The current economic climate has created an imperative for Rapid Response to become a national priority once again, and ETA is committed to promoting successful Rapid Response practices and strategies that are consistent, timely, and of the highest possible quality wherever layoffs occur.

b. ETA's Vision for Rapid Response

Flexible and responsive, Rapid Response is at the heart of the promise that the workforce investment system makes to both the working public and the nation's employers: **When you need us most, we will be there.**

To keep this promise, and achieve the ultimate goal of enabling affected workers to return to work as quickly as possible following a layoff, or to prevent their layoff altogether, Rapid Response must take an ongoing, comprehensive approach to identifying, planning for, and responding to layoffs, and preventing or minimizing their impacts wherever possible. To ensure high quality and maximum effectiveness, successful Rapid Response strategies must include at least the following:

- Informational and direct reemployment services for workers;
- Solutions for businesses in transition (growth and decline);
- Convening, facilitating, and brokering connections, networks, and partners; and,
- Strategic planning, data gathering and analysis designed to anticipate, prepare for, and manage economic transition.

Informational and Direct Reemployment Services for Workers

The ultimate goal of Rapid Response is to enable workers who have been or will be affected by layoffs to return to work as soon as possible by serving workers at a critical point – at the time of layoff announcement. Rapid Response should provide immediate, on-site customized services for workers upon notice of layoffs and plant closures, and work to avert or minimize the impacts of those layoffs by helping workers obtain new employment as quickly as possible. The Rapid Response regulations allow for a wide array of on-site services to be provided, and ETA encourages all Rapid Response teams to provide the widest array of services possible based on the needs of the workers and the employer.

Solutions for Businesses in Transition (Growth and Decline)

Rapid Response should also benefit employers by helping them prepare for and manage economic transition and related workforce challenges. Rapid Response realizes its full potential when it is managed as a business service, building and maintaining relationships with employers across the business cycle. Meeting the needs of the workers requires meeting the needs of their

employers. The most effective Rapid Response systems nationally are skilled in defining and proving their value to businesses in terms that businesses use and understand (such as return on investment.) Understanding the services Rapid Response can provide to businesses, and then marketing these services to businesses and focusing on addressing specific needs of the employer will help ensure that employers understand that Rapid Response is a critical partner.

Rapid Response *should not* be a single, on-site visit to an employer in response to the filing of a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act notice. Optimal application of Rapid Response as a transition management service allows the workforce investment system to remain relevant across the entire business cycle—during times of growth and times of decline. When Rapid Response is viewed solely as a reactive service to individuals affected by layoffs, much of its inherent value is lost. While working to reduce the effects of a layoff on individuals is a valuable service, the scope is limited and often fails to meet the greater challenges facing a region's economy.

The regulations emphasize the importance of Rapid Response in talent recapture—keeping a skilled workforce engaged in the existing regional economy or industry—and talent redeployment—retraining a proven workforce to meet a region's changing economic needs. The flexible programmatic options available through Rapid Response allow states and local areas to play an active role in shaping and maintaining a competitive, resilient regional workforce. When used to its full potential, Rapid Response provides significant value to the business community, allowing the workforce investment system to play a pivotal role in the regional economy and fulfilling the promise of a robust and proactive workforce investment system.

Convening, Facilitating, and Brokering Connections, Networks, and Partners

While delivering direct services to customers through Rapid Response is critical, being a broker of solutions for a range of customers is equally important. Effective Rapid Response teams develop and maintain a comprehensive set of partnerships designed to provide customers—dislocated workers, incumbent workers, organized labor and employee representatives, growing and downsizing employers, other components of the workforce investment system, and outplacement firms—the services, resources, and benefits they need and for which they are eligible. To do this, Rapid Response teams must develop and maintain effective strategic partnerships at the state, regional, and local levels. As part of this Initiative, ETA intends to develop and maintain partnerships at the national level to provide additional support to your efforts (see Section d below on Elements of the Initiative).

Effective layoff aversion cannot occur without strong, diverse partnerships, such as with economic development, education providers, business associations, and many other state and local government organizations. Many layoff aversion activities and strategies rely on partnerships and relationships, as they are often funded or provided by organizations outside the workforce investment system.

Strategic Planning, Data Gathering and Analysis Designed to Anticipate, Prepare for, and Manage Economic Transition

Effective strategic planning is made possible by gathering and analyzing data from a number of sources. Rapid Response teams have access to real-time information on layoffs and growth, as well as information on available skilled workers for growing companies. They also have comprehensive partnerships that provide a wide array of additional information and data. Developing early warning networks and systems to understand economic transition trends within industries, communities, or at specific employers, and planning strategies for intervention are important activities for Rapid Response teams. Strategic planning and data gathering and analysis are critical to high quality Rapid Response activities.

c. What the Rapid Response Initiative Will Achieve

The National Rapid Response Initiative will enhance and improve the Rapid Response system throughout the country by promoting high quality, consistent, and timely practices nationwide. It will bring together and harness the creativity of Rapid Response experts from across the country to create a comprehensive, coordinated approach to collaboratively improving services. The National Rapid Response Initiative will focus on collaboration and communication, promoting promising practices and innovations developed in the field. It will ensure that Rapid Response is conducted as a comprehensive, strategic approach to managing transition within the economy, and promote Rapid Response as a solution—focusing on building new careers and growing business rather than the negative aspects of layoffs.

d. Elements of the Initiative

To help launch this Initiative, ETA has brought Ken Messina, the Rapid Response Manager for Massachusetts, a widely respected thought leader and practitioner of innovative, quality Rapid Response, on board through an Intergovernmental Personnel Agreement. His experience and creativity will be invaluable to the National Rapid Response Initiative. The activities that will be part of the Initiative include:

Regional Rapid Response Roundtables—ETA has hosted Roundtable meetings on Rapid Response in five of ETA's regional office cities, with Region 6 scheduled for August 2010.

These Roundtables had two primary goals:

- To begin establishing consistent Rapid Response capacity nationwide; and,
- To identify areas in need of additional guidance, training and technical assistance.

As part of the Roundtables, each of the states was asked to help ETA identify technical assistance and training needs, as well as promising and innovative practices. ETA provided a Rapid Response Self-Assessment Benchmarking tool to help state and local Rapid Response teams identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas where they need or want technical assistance or training.

National Rapid Response Workgroup—The National Rapid Response Workgroup, comprised of Federal, state, and local Rapid Response practitioners and partners who have been nominated by

ETA's Regional and National Offices, will develop technical assistance tools and resources to promote high quality, consistent and innovative Rapid Response practices. Among other activities, the Workgroup may focus on defining layoff aversion and providing tools and resources to allow states and local areas to implement effective, comprehensive layoff aversion strategies designed to minimize or prevent layoffs. The Workgroup will also assist ETA in delivering training and technical assistance directly to states or local areas.

Rapid Response Guidance—This Training and Employment Notice (TEN) is the first of a series of official guidance documents planned by ETA. ETA intends to issue a series of Training and Employment Guidance Letters and/or TENs focusing on the areas articulated in the vision statement, as well as other important topics. ETA is committed to providing ongoing guidance on Rapid Response and other issues identified through the Roundtables, Workgroup and other sources.

National Rapid Response Summit—ETA will host a National Rapid Response Summit that will be a culmination of the work begun at each of the Regional Rapid Response Roundtables and continued through the National Rapid Response Workgroup. The Summit will be designed to promote the development of an “ideal” Rapid Response model and to share innovative practices. Although the exact date has not been determined, we anticipate the Summit to take place in fall 2010.

Rapid Response Community of Practice—ETA has launched an online resource for sharing information and communication amongst the Rapid Response community, which is one of the numerous communities of practice housed at www.workforce3one.org. To join or access the Rapid Response community go to the following link: <http://rapidresponse.workforce3one.org>.

This user-driven online community was developed per the request of Rapid Response practitioners and includes blogs and discussion forums, and will serve as a place to find promising practices, as well as policy guidance, training materials, a calendar of events and other items of interest to the Rapid Response community and its many partners. ETA encourages active participation, including sharing of resources, opportunities, challenges, and questions, to ensure the success of this user-driven resource.

Partnership Development—ETA will work with national organizations including Federal agency partners, national organized labor representatives, national industry and employer associations, and other stakeholder groups to promote the benefits of partnering at the state and local level with Rapid Response teams.

4. Moving Forward. The National Rapid Response Initiative will only be successful if Federal, state, and local Rapid Response teams and stakeholders work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and strive for innovation. ETA is committed to ensuring that the Rapid Response system fully realizes its potential and hopes to count on you to do your part to make this Initiative a success and improve Rapid Response across the country.

What you do every day is so important to workers, businesses, and communities across the country. By working together we can be a significant positive force to help lead our country back on the path towards economic growth and prosperity.

If you have questions or suggestions, or are interested in accessing direct training or technical assistance, please contact the National Rapid Response Coordinator, Ken Messina, at messina.ken@dol.gov.

The ETA National Office and each ETA Regional Office also has other Rapid Response points of contact that can be called upon for assistance:

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