Minutes
Work Support Strategies Grant Advisory Committee
9:00 – 10:30 AM; June 29, 2011
Louis Pasteur Building, West Wing

Present: Sandra Powell, Corinne Calise Russo, Deborah Buffi, Peter Lee, Kathy Partington, Diane Cook, Lissa DiMauro, Phil Silva, Stephanie Geller, Jane Hayward, Cristine Amedeo, Kevin Madigan, Sharon Santilli, Fred Sneesby, Kathleen Gorman, Maria Cimini, Lindsey Brickel, Denise Tatro, David Celeste, Maria Volpe, Debbie Anthens, Elizabeth Burke-Bryant, Paula McFarland

Director Powell introduced herself and welcomed everyone to the meeting. After everyone has introduced themselves to the group, the Director distributed and reviewed a handout of the Work Support Strategies Grant **Timeline** from the work of the Modernization Initiative through the Site Visit by the grant sponsors to the Director's visit with the Ford Foundation Board of Trustees at the end of March.

It was noted that Rhode Island's size most likely helped RI receive the grant (small enough to be a laboratory, diverse populations, and considerable impact from the recession). The grant sponsors and Foundation Trustees expressed an interest in the linkage of DHS programs to work throughout the state, or, the economic empowerment of our clients. This means not just work supports but also employment strategies that make sense for families. It is clear that what RI is facing is similar to other states: transforming how we deliver services. One advantage of being a grant recipient is that we can benefit from the experience of other states and from the technical assistance offered through the grant sponsors.

Six individuals representing DHS went to the Kickoff Meeting in Washington at the end of April. Rhode Island was unique in that we had community partners attend, not just state employees.

The Project Team began meeting bi-weekly and is, of course, working the grant daily.

A handout was distributed that outlined the **Purpose** of the Ford Foundation Grant, and, Rhode Island's **Goals for this Year of Planning**.

It was noted that the Foundation's first goal is not just improving access to services and benefits but, more importantly, helping families "achieve financial independence." If we are successful in meeting the Foundation's expectations during this planning year, we can be competitive for grants that would fund implementation of the plan.

A member asked if more money would become available in addition to the funds already dedicated to the implementation grants. It seems that the Ford Foundation already has one additional national funder and is talking with other philanthropies.

The six goals that RI has for the planning year were reviewed. For the second goal, conducting a business process analysis, money and help is built into the grant through visits to other states and through study and guidance from the Southern Institute. David Celeste, Maria Volpe, and Deborah Buffi recounted their visit to New Mexico and what they learned about changes New Mexico has made to their day-to-day operations. They found it very encouraging because New Mexico were able to make process changes without major changes to computer systems.

Jane Hayward wondered about DHS' interface with community agencies, particularly examining where the federal government will or won't allow community partners to participate in program operations. She noted that federal regulations are often inflexible about program requirements and found that the various federal programs do not talk to each other, which slows progress on the state level.

The Director responded that she expected to give that kind of feedback to the federal government. She recalled an Executive Order by President Obama that directed OMB to examine those kinds of impediments, that is, federal rules that conflict and work against serving the public. Deborah Buffi also mentioned the interchange that is happening on the grant website and the sort of sharing of resources and insights that will give guidance not only to the states but also to the federal government. Elizabeth Burke Bryant also noted that the work "interoperability" is "in the air" on the federal level, signaling some receptivity on their part to making the system better coordinated for the sake of delivering services more effectively.

A **Work Plan** and **Gant Chart** for this planning year were distributed. These detail what we are undertaking this year to develop a roadmap for the future. It will not be easy, but we have to change to be effective going forward whether we have a grant or not. The Ford grant gives us a chance to leap frog some changes.

Elena Nicolella gave a presentation on the **Impact of Health Care Reform** on the outlook for change in the major programs of the Department of Human Services. She said that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) is driving Medicaid reform to think of Medicaid as health insurance. Traditionally, Medicaid has been looked upon as one support for families and individuals among others. Now, we are looking to bring Medicaid as insurance into the RI Health Insurance Exchange. Our approach to reform and to the Exchange is to keep both these goals together: Medicaid as a health insurance option and as an economic support.

Right now, the Medicaid eligibility system is intertwined in the inRhodes computer system with all the major programs. Over the next several years, this computer system will be converted into a new one. It will be done in three Phases.

Phase 1 will build a "rules engine" that will determine eligibility for income-based eligibles and those eligible for premium subsidies. This will be operational by 2014. Phase 2 will incorporate more complex Medicaid programs into the new computer system. This will be operational by 2015. Phase 3 is most important for the focus of the Ford grant because it is in that phase that the rules for other programs (SNAP, RIWorks, Child Care, Child Support) will be incorporated into the new system. This will be operational by 2016

Jane Hayward asked if the expected Health Insurance Exchange will be open for the possibility of a Basic health Plan and was told that yes, this is a possibility.

It is a very aggressive timeline but one made necessary by the availability of federal funds that will pay for 90% of the new system. During these phases, inRhodes will continue to play an important role and the new system will intersect with inRhodes and use some of its functionality.

The Director thanked Elena for her presentation and emphasized that we want to build a computer system that serves the needs of families, not vice-versa. We are trying to match our best business practices that help families with a new computer system, and so a lot of our work now is studying and analyzing those business practices and improving and simplifying them before we move ahead on the computer system development.

Discussion turned to the **Role of the Advisory Committee**. It was stated that the department needs the Committee's advice, guidance, and feedback as it works through the grant. The Committee can provide the perspectives of clients and community partners. Discussion continued about the frequency of meetings and the next meeting dates. In between meetings, the department will keep members informed of the grant work on a regular basis.

A member asked if we can identify short-term goals and implement them even though this is a planning year. Director Powell said that, yes, these sorts of "quick wins" were already being identified and the intention to move on those when possible.

Phil Silva reinforced the importance of re-building our business processes first before moving ahead on computer enhancements or innovations.

Peter Lee asked how we will do a cost analysis to measure prevention efforts, to make our case for sustainability of programs; in other words, when do we identify our own targets to judge if the changes we make are worth it? It was pointed out that this is Ford's first goal, the strengthening of families and asking what is it that we really want to achieve as a department and as a state. We need to establish certain targets that hold us accountable as we go forward and that would benchmark progress. What are the goals of the work we do? How are we positively affecting families? Do we measure improved health outcomes, or higher income? What are those benchmarks?

Kathleen Gorman asked that we not lose sight of the work of the Modernization Committee and that we revisit some of those valuable discussions. It was noted that the products of the Modernization Initiative have been incorporated into the work of the grant.