

News & Views online

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Work Opportunity Tax Credit Program

In an agency with as many specialized programs as BEP has, it is sometimes difficult to understand the intricacies involved in many of them. Have you ever wondered about the WOTC program? WOTC stands for Work Opportunity Tax Credit. It is a service provided to businesses that also assists jobseekers.

With a combined service total of about 50-years, Elana Stowers, Charlotte Jenkins and Candy Noel work hard to keep up. This small unit handles about 1000 cases a month. A case is assigned by applicant, but an applicant can have more than one employer. Leave it to say that well over 4000 employers are currently benefiting from this program. Enough about this, though, let's explore just what WOTC is.

Created by the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, WOTC was designed to help jobseekers with significant barriers find employment. Those jobseekers include Welfare/Temporary Assistance to Needy Families recipients, food stamp recipients, veterans receiving food stamps, vocational rehabilitation clients, Supplemental Security Income recipients, ex-felons and qualified summer youths. The program is designed to help people move from economic dependency to self-sufficiency by encouraging employers in the private sector to hire these jobseekers.

Clockwise from front: Candy Noel, Elana Stowers and Charlotte Jenkins



News&Views photo by Richard Westfall

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Processing applications is part of the job, but WOTC Coordinator Elana Stowers says there is so much more. "Just hearing the word 'tax' brings about a boring image—this job is anything but," Stowers said. "It is interesting meeting with employers, tax attorneys, consultants, and with representatives from several other state agencies." According to Stowers, marketing the program is a big part of the education process. A WOTC presence at local job fairs, Chamber of Commerce meetings and Employer Advisory Committee meetings facilitates the education and marketing process.

Training is another very important function of the unit. Agency staff, representatives from other state agencies and employers all need to learn about the benefits of the program. Also, WOTC Coordinators from each state meet every year or so to share new ideas, best practices and other new information with everyone else.

"We are a business service," Stowers related. "Employers who hire long-term welfare recipients can earn up to \$8500 in tax credits. The rewards are two-fold, though, as we have also served applicants who previously didn't have jobs."

NASWA Notes

Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao recently outlined the President's Fiscal Year 2006 budget for the Department of Labor. The President's budget provides added resources for enforcement and compliance assistance to protect workers' health, safety, pay, benefits and union dues. The budget also proposes new job training reforms to make federal-state training programs more flexible and effective. The budget also calls for passage of Association Health Plan legislation and other legislative initiatives related to the Department's agencies and programs.

"This budget strengthens our ability to protect workers and prepare them for good jobs in the 21st century economy," said Secretary Chao. "Additional resources will enable us to continue our record-breaking enforcement of worker protection laws, and innovative job training measures will put valuable training options directly in the hands of workers."

Details of the Department's FY 2006 budget include the following:

Veterans' Re-Employment Rights & Assistance

The Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is allocated \$224.3 million in the FY 2006 budget to continue ensuring that veterans returning home are re-employed with the same seniority, status, pay and benefits they had when they were deployed. The Department recently initiated a rulemaking to strengthen and clarify veterans' rights and employers' responsibilities under USERRA, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. The budget also supports job training to help veterans qualify for good civilian jobs. The budget also calls for a \$1.5 million increase to help homeless veterans find work and integrate into society, and other purposes.

Job Training Innovations

The FY 2006 budget includes the Administration's new job training reform proposal to consolidate four major Department of Labor programs and allow states to add consolidated grant resources from other federal job training and employment programs. This reform is designed to create greater state flexibility in exchange for increased accountability in preparing people to find and keep good jobs with growing wages.

The FY2006 budget transfers the \$59.7 million Youth-Build program, which targets training to 16-24 year olds for construction jobs, from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Department of Labor. The second year of the President's four year Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative is budgeted for \$75 million, with \$35 million allocated to the Department of Labor, \$25 million to HUD and \$15 million to the Department of Justice. These reforms, along with a \$250 million community college job training initiative, will offer flexible, effective training options to more workers than before.

African-American History Month: February 2005

As of July 1, 2003, there were an estimated 38.7 million U.S. residents who were either black or black and at least one other race. This race group then made up 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population.

Education

80% – Among blacks age 25 and over, the proportion that had at least a high school diploma in 2003, a record high. This proportion rose by 10 percentage points from 1993 to 2003. For blacks ages 25 to 29, the proportion is considerably higher: 88 percent.

17% – Among blacks age 25 and over, the proportion that had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2003, up 5 percentage points from 1993.

1.0 million – Among blacks age 25 and over, the number who had an advanced degree in 2003 (e.g., master's, Ph.D., M.D. or J.D.).

\$2.5 million – Estimated work life earnings for full-time, year-round, black workers with an advanced degree. For blacks (and people of other races), more education means higher career earnings: blacks without a high school diploma would earn less than \$1 million during their work life, increasing to \$1.0 million for those with a high school education and \$1.7 million for those with a bachelor's degree.

Serving Our Nation

2.3 million – Number of black military veterans in the United States in 2003.

Income and Poverty

About \$30,000 – The annual median income in 2003 of black households. This represents no change from 2002.

24.4% – Poverty rate in 2003 for those reporting black as their only race. This rate was unchanged from 2002.

Families

8.9 million – Number of black families in the United States. Of these, nearly one-half (47 percent) are married-couple families.

Among black married-couple families, 34 percent consist of two members, and 19 percent consist of five or more members.

10% – Proportion of black children who live in a household maintained by a grandparent.

48% – The proportion of black householders who own their own home.

Jobs

31,400 – The number of black physicians and surgeons. Blacks are represented in a wide variety of occupations. For

continued on page 3

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE APPROVES WIA REFORM BILL

The House Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness this week approved legislation (H.R. 27) on a party-line vote to reauthorize and reform the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) (P.L. 105-220). The bill was scheduled for consideration by the House Education and the Workforce Committee on Wednesday, February 16 and was expected to be approved by the full House before recessing on March 20 for a two-week Easter break.

House Subcommittee members attempted to balance the interests of states, localities, religious organizations and the requests of the Administration as they considered a series of amendments, mostly offered by members of the Minority party. The most sweeping amendment approved was offered by Subcommittee Chairman Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-CA) to authorize the President's proposal for community-based job training grants. Additionally, Chairman McKeon's substitute amendment would: include a "placeholder" definition on administrative costs pending further discussion; remove the calculation of program efficiency as a core indicator of performance for both adult and youth programs and requires instead that states report on the cost per participant; clarifies eligibility for WIA youth services by requiring an out-of-school youth who has finished high school and has low basic skills must not be attending school; and, change the Labor Market Information System by eliminating the requirement of governors to designate a single state agency for management of the system.

Chairman McKeon's amendment would create authority in the demonstration section of WIA to authorize the USDOL to award community-based job training grants with available funding. The Congress appropriated \$250 million for this initiative in its FY 2005 spending bill, available beginning July 1, 2005. Through the demonstration, the Secretary of Labor will award competitive grants to community colleges or a consortium of community colleges that will work in conjunction with the local workforce investment system and a business or businesses in a qualified industry. Grants awarded under the demonstration would be available for: the developing of rigorous training and education programs; training workers in the skills and competencies needed to obtain or upgrade employment in high-growth, high-demand occupations; disseminating information on high-growth, high-demand occupations; placing trained individuals in new jobs; and increasing the integration of qualified training providers with the activities of businesses and the one-stop delivery system to meet training needs.

Representatives John Tierney (D-MA), Dale Kildee (D-MI) and Robert Andrews (D-NJ) offered an amendment to eliminate language giving governors the discretion to determine partners' contributions for administration of the one-stop system. They expressed concern governors would be granted broad discretion to take from programs whose appropriations are inadequate, further reducing the quality of their services. Representative John Boehner (R-OH), Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce successfully argued against the amendment saying WIA is built on a foundation of proportionate sharing

This section is dedicated to the dedicated—to those who make a difference in the lives of our customers—both internal and external.

Big Gold Star Page



To Whom It May Concern:

Many thanks for getting the checks out in such a timely manner during Christmas week. I just wanted you to know how much I appreciated your effort. I needed mine so badly! Thank you so much.

An Unemployment Compensation Customer

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of costs from one-stop partners. In countering the argument, governors would be granted new broad power, Chairman Boehner said the legislation as a whole "limits governors authority more than what is in place today." He pointed to the new requirements under the distribution of WIA program funding, which would require 50 percent of the state allocation to go to localities for the delivery of core services and to support state staff that provides core services in agreement with local boards.

Amendments approved by the Subcommittee included two by Representative Luis Fortuna (R-PR) to require state plans to describe how individuals with limited English proficiency will be served and ensuring English as a second language courses are offered to individuals otherwise limited by English-based training. The Subcommittee agreed by unanimous consent to an amendment offered by Representative Rush Holt (D-NJ) to require the Secretary of Labor submit to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions the summary of each states quarterly financial reports submitted to governors. Representative Ron Kind's (D-WI) amendment to authorize and give priority for the awarding of competitive grants to train "realtime writers" was approved by unanimous consent. A "realtime writer" is someone who assists the hearing impaired by providing the script for closed captioning of video programming.

The Subcommittee disapproved by party-line votes amendments to: increase annual WIA program appropriations by \$750 million (Holt, D-NJ); strike the language authorizing the Personal Re-employment Accounts program (Kildee, D-MI); maintain separate line-items for the WIA Adult, WIA Dislocated worker and Wagner-Peyser programs (Tierney, D-NJ); strike the bill's youth provisions (Tierney, D-NJ); and, modify "sequence of services" language (Tierney, D-NJ). Finally, the Subcommittee disapproved of an amendment by party-line vote to eliminate language allowing religious organizations that receive federal funds for the administration of WIA programs to hire individuals on the basis of religion.

How to communicate clearly in the office

Communicating clearly in the office is especially important for managers. If you're tired of telling people at work what needs to be done over and over again, follow the tips below:

- After running a meeting, send out an e-mail summarizing what was decided and what's next.
- Make sure you spend some actual face time with peers. E-mail and telephone conversations don't count. The benefits you will reap from actual contact will pay off, even though it will take up more of your time.
- Communicate more. Unless you're an obsessive micromanager, chances are you aren't communicating enough. One way to test whether you need to communicate more: Ask your employees to write their job descriptions and the direction your department is headed. If everyone is not in sync, you'll know by the answers, and that will mean you need to communicate more.
- Ask your employees for their insights. Asking them what they think about a decision after it has been made is disrespectful and robs you of the value they can add.
- Eliminate cliches, fuzzy words and jargon from your communication. You'll be working smarter and your employees will appreciate the clarity.

—adapted from the ABC News website

Public places installing cell phone jammers

The private use of cell phone blockers is illegal in the United States and most Western countries, but the tide is turning.

Japan now allows public places to install cell phone jammers. So as long as theater owners or concert hall owners get a government-issued license, it's legal. France's industry minister approved the use of such jammers, so long as there are provisions that emergency calls can still be made.

It is likely that this trend will become commonplace in the world in the near future—so places like churches, theaters, concert halls, government meeting places, etc., will have them installed worldwide.

—adapted from the ABC News website

Putting a cap on information overload

If you feel overwhelmed by the amount of information you have to process every day, don't feel alone. Here are a few tips to help you cope with the glut of data that floods our lives:

- Take a break. One day a week vow to not turn your computer on for the entire day. Spend that time with your friends and family.
- Be careful to whom you give your cell phone number. It's probably best to limit it to family and friends.

- Limit your computer searches or the time you spend answering e-mail. Set a timer, and when your time is up, quit. Don't let yourself cruise the Internet for hours.
- Don't be consumed or obsessed with your e-mail. Checking it at designated times, say three times a day might be best. For example, you could check it at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.
- If you're receiving e-newsletters that you don't want and that you don't read, write to the appropriate Webmaster to get your name off the list. Cancel hard copy subscriptions, too, if you can't keep up with them.
- Don't let e-mail exchanges go on for too long. Set a rule for yourself such as "after the third e-mail I'll pick up the phone and call."

—adapted from Organic Style

Valentine's Day statistics

Estimated number of roses sold for Valentine's Day in 2003 was 156 million.

What kind of flowers are people spending their money on?



- 83 percent are buying cut flowers.
- 12 percent are buying flowering and green houseplants.
- 5 percent are buying outdoor bedding and garden plants.

Of cut flowers sold, 57 percent are roses, 24 percent are mixed flowers, 8 percent are carnations and 11 percent are other single flower types.

Of roses sold, 66 percent are red, 9 percent are pink, 4 percent are yellow, 5 percent are peach/salmon, 1 percent are white, 10 percent are mixed colors, 2 percent are purple/violet and 3 percent are other.

Who's buying flowers for Valentine's Day? Valentine's Day floral purchases by gender: 67 percent are made by men and 33 percent by women.

For whom are they buying the flowers? While men buy mostly for romantic reasons, women use Valentine's Day as an opportunity to show they care to mothers, daughters, sisters and friends, as well as their sweethearts. Women even treat themselves on Valentine's Day.

—adapted from aboutflowers.com

Healthy Heads-up

Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food. Practicing healthy habits will help you stay healthy during the flu season.

Retiree news

On December 6th, Florence Bias, retired manager of Beckley Job Service, had a visit from other retired Beckley Job Service staff. Victoria Harrah, Olga Mastalski, Shirley Simms & Ruth Yost enjoyed pizza, cake, drinks, did a lot of reminiscing and catching up on what everyone's been doing since retirement. It was good seeing Florence's husband, Tom, and their cats came in for a back rub, too. A great time was had by all!



*News&Views photo by Ruth Yost
Clockwise from front: Florence Bias,
Victoria Harrah, Olga Mastalski and
Shirley Simms.*

New medical microchip approved

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recently approved an implantable microchip for medical uses.

When scanned, the VeriChip emits an identification number that can be linked to a person's medical information. Critics worry about privacy, but advocates say ER doctors and ambulance crews can access life-saving information even if the patient is not conscious.

In the future, microchips that measure bodily functions like blood pressure and pulse could be implanted.

—adapted from Time

How to Recognize a Stroke

Each year an estimated 600,000 Americans experience strokes, which are interruptions of the blood supply to any part of the brain, resulting in damaged brain tissue. Of these victims, 160,000 die, making stroke the third leading cause of death in the U.S. Those persons this dread killer does not immediately send to the grave are often left with lifelong debilitating infirmities of speech, movement, and even thought.

A stroke is a serious medical event, both because it can (and does) kill, and because it can inflict long-term harm on those lucky enough to survive it. There are two types of acute stroke: ischemic and hemorrhagic. Ischemic strokes account for 80 percent of all such "brain attacks" and occur when a blood clot lodges in a vessel responsible for supplying blood to the brain, killing off part of the brain. A hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a blood vessel in the brain ruptures, resulting in bleeding which causes swelling and hematoma, and ultimately impairs brain function.

The following test was drawn from a report presented in February 2003 at the American Stroke Association's 28th International Stroke Conference. In a nutshell, recognizing that a stroke has taken place is something just about anyone can

do, and it's a skill worth mastering in light of the importance of getting medical attention for stroke victims at the earliest possible moment.

The warning signs of a stroke are:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg, especially on one side of the body.
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding.
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes.
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination.
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause.

Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. A stroke victim may suffer permanent brain damage when people fail to recognize what's happening. Now, doctors say any bystander can recognize a stroke, simply by asking three questions:

- ask the individual to smile.
- ask him or her to raise both arms.
- ask the person to speak a simple sentence.

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call 911 immediately, and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher. Researchers are urging the general public to learn to ask these three questions quickly, to someone they suspect of having a stroke. Widespread use of this test could result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of a stroke, and prevent permanent brain damage.

By distilling the assessment process down to those three simple tests, anyone is likely to remember what to ask of someone they suspect has just undergone a stroke and to correctly interpret the information so gleaned. (The tests are pass/fail, after all, so if the person they were administered to couldn't smile, couldn't raise her arms, and was incoherent, the party observing all this wouldn't be at a loss for what to make of the results—she'd conclude her friend had undergone a stroke.)

And it is important laypeople learn to recognize such events, because a new drug has been shown to limit disability from strokes caused by clots (ischemic) provided victims receive it within three hours of the onset of stroke symptoms. Tissue plasminogen activator is a clot-busting drug administered intravenously in cases of ischemic stroke; however, only one in fifty stroke patients has a chance of this drug helping them because currently only 2 percent of them reach an emergency room in time for TPA to be given.

*Editor's note: **Please** take the time to learn these symptoms and tests. I recently had experience through my family with stroke. My family member was not aware she had experienced a stroke until the following day as she was trying to sign in at her dental office and could not write. Though damage was minimal, earlier intervention may have negated damage needing long-term recovery.*

January Employees of the Month

With nearly 35 years of service, Libby Harvey, Greenbrier Valley UC, has seen many changes throughout the years. The one constant during her years of service is Libby's commitment to her customers. According to nomination information, Libby always puts her customers first, even if it means working well into the evening to be sure her customers get paid on time. Also noted was Libby's willingness to perform any and all duties necessary to give quality service. She has even been known to work the UC office alone. Coworkers note her willingness to help others—volunteering before asked when other offices may need assistance. Libby is someone who came up through the ranks to her position of office manager. What sets her apart as an exemplary employee is her willingness to share her knowledge while continuously adding to it.



When Jim Wolfingbarger joined the agency a little over two years ago, little did he know he would be stepping into a maelstrom of continuing change. In the time Jim has been with the bureau, he has had an office in and worked in three different buildings. Jim works for FAM Administrative Support Services, currently on assignment to the Procurement Unit. Rarely seen without a smile on his face, Jim has accepted each assignment with enthusiasm and confidence. From supervising FAM Records Management to moving 200-pound file cabinets to procuring equipment and supplies, Jim strives to perfection. He is professional, yet approachable—friendly, yet respectful. Jim sets a standard for others to attain, while providing the motivation for them to do so.

For a little over 6 ½ years, Mary Borgel, employment programs specialist senior, has been a shining example and tremendous asset to UC Benefits and Technical Support in the central office. Having come to the bureau from the Vermont Unemployment Compensation agency, Mary showed up with a terrific work attitude and a caring for her customers. According to nomination information, Mary is meticulous and thorough in every avenue of her job. She willingly assists others, and at times takes the initiative to help out in other areas of her office. Mary has a positive attitude, no matter the assignment, and is extremely modest in accepting praise. Mary always keeps the best interest of her customers, both internal and external, at heart with any task she is assigned. She is always smiling and is highly praised by her customers.



downloaded onto a PC. Your stored image will then be compared to an image taken of you at the checkpoint. Then face-scanning software will compare the images by measuring and analyzing your facial features.

In the future, you might see the passport eventually replaced by a worldwide database of faces and fingerprints.

—adapted by Wired magazine

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Upgrading the passport

The next-generation passport booklet being tested by the government has a microchip embedded in it. The chip stores information, including your photo identification, which can be accessed by facial recognition software. The new document will likely become standard issue in the next year. The plan is a worldwide attempt to improve security.

The application process won't change, but your cost will rise by \$5 or \$10. The chip is built to last 10 years and survive the usual travel conditions. It will be able to hold 64 Kbytes of encrypted information.

When you use your passport at a checkpoint, your information will be



In Memoriam

Darlena Sue Cartwright, stepdaughter of UC Employer Audit's Vivian Cartright, died January 26 in Saint Albans. Carolyn Sue Browning Deel, retired ES Program Support employment programs specialist senior and wife of ES Field Operations Ken Deel, died Feb. 2 in Charleston. Ethel Lemaster, sister of Martinsburg Job Service's Barbara Henderson, died February 19 in Shenandoah Junction.

Budget Review

Facing a proposed budget cut of \$146M in 2006, reforms to the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (whose authorization expired in 2003) are being entertained by the federal government. A national network of some 3,600 One-Stop Career Centers currently provides services. Numerous Government Accountability Office reports have urged reforms. Under current law too few workers are trained, duplicative programs produce excessive overhead costs and administrative complexity, accountability is insufficient, Governor's have too little control and flexibility, and programs do not train workers in high-growth industries.

The 2006 Budget proposes comprehensive reforms to WIA that would consolidate in a single State grant the funds for four major Federal training and employment programs (i.e., Dislocated Workers, Adults, Youth, and the Employment Service), and give Governors broad flexibility to include within the consolidated State grant additional related programs. Governors would have to meet strict performance standards and would be held accountable for results (employment, retention, and earnings of persons trained with Federal funds). The proposal also would create new Innovation Training Accounts for self-directed worker training. The proposal would reduce Federal red tape and put strict limits on overhead, allowing a modest reduction in new budget authority while ensuring that more of the funding goes to train workers. The reform builds on the Administration's previous proposals to reauthorize and reform WIA.

In the 2006 Budget, Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker Training and Reintegration of Youthful Offenders programs were eliminated. Three other programs, International Labor Affairs Bureau, Office of Disability Employment Policy, and Workforce Investment Act Pilots and Demonstrations, suffered reductions in funding of \$155M.

A happy home is one in which each spouse grants the possibility that the other may be right, though neither believes it.

—Don Fraser

Carbon monoxide safety tips for your home

Carbon monoxide is a colorless and nearly odorless gas. It is poisonous to animals and people. It is created by the incomplete burning of solid, liquid and gaseous fuels. Appliances that burn LP gas (liquefied petroleum), oil, coal, kerosene, or wood may produce carbon monoxide.

Symptoms of the poisoning are:

- Headache
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Dizziness

How to prevent CO poisoning:

- Buy and install a CO alarm—make sure it is listed with Underwriter's Laboratories or that there is information on the package that indicates that it meets the requirements of IAS 6-96 standards. Follow the directions for placement and installation.
- Install appliances properly—most of them should be installed by a professional.
- Have your heating system inspected and serviced every year.
- Only burn charcoal outdoors. Never burn it in a tent, home, garage, vehicle, etc.
- Do not use portable fuel-burning camping equipment indoors or inside tents, etc.
- Make sure you turn off fuel-burning engine equipment when you are inside a garage or basement. Just having the doors open does not ensure your safety.
- Always follow the manual directions when servicing fuel-burning equipment.
- Do not use gas appliances, such as ranges, ovens or clothes dryers to heat your home.
- If you use a fuel-burning appliance that is approved for indoors, make sure it is vented to the outside following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Install and use exhaust fans over gas stoves.
- Open flues when you use your fireplace.
- Choose the proper size wood-burning stove for you home.
- Have a professional inspect, clean and tune up your central heating system (furnaces, flues and chimneys) annually.

—adapted from the American Red Cross of Rhode Island website

