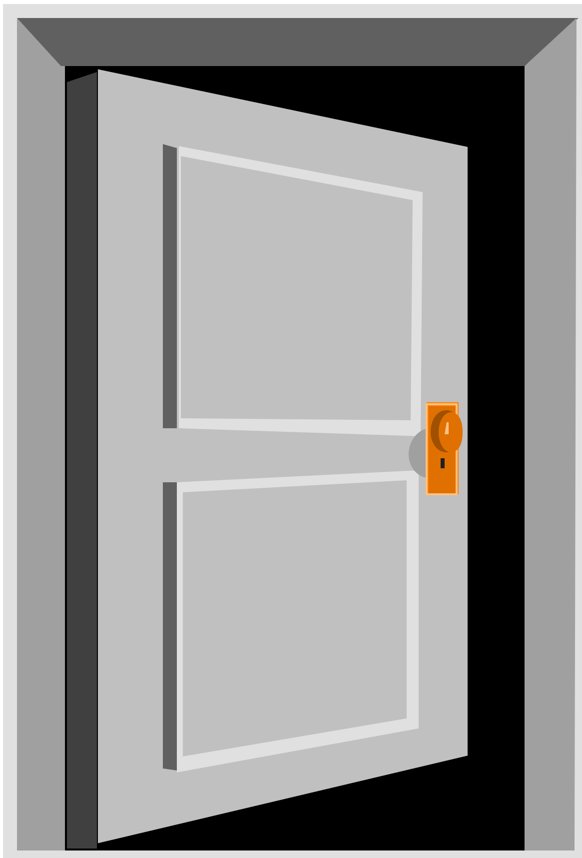
RAPID RESPONSE



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Draft Document

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

What Is Rapid Response?

Rapid Response is a process that provides information and services to employees experiencing job loss. When a layoff is announced, Rapid Response links community services to employees to assist them in securing new jobs.

The Effects of Job Loss

Involuntary job loss can be one of the most stressful events in a person's life. The impact on a person's sense of worth and self-esteem can be devastating. Many people suffer depression, decreased life satisfaction, increased social isolation and feelings of powerlessness. Some people loose their sense of time. This experience leads to feelings of apathy, passivity and resignation. The types and amounts of support offered by the company and community during layoffs is critical to reducing the severity of the initial impact on the employee. This support also increases the chances of the employees successfully adjusting to the situation and securing new employment.

The Rapid Response program was created to coordinate transition assistance to impacted employees. The process promotes early intervention and provides a variety of transition services to employees, unions, companies and communities.

Local Workforce Customization

This guide provides a basic overview of the Rapid Response program. The Rapid Response program was built on the foundation of flexibility and adaptability. This guide invites Workforce Development Agencies and Local Boards to create activities, policies and goals to best serve their community. Only through local customization can the Rapid Response program work successfully in your community.

Living Document

This document attempts to capture the Rapid Response system of today. This document will continue to change as the workforce development system evolves. This evolution will result in examples of new best practices. New information and perspective will be added to this manual. This manual serves as a foundation for development.

Terms

Throughout this document, Workforce Policy Boards and Workforce Development Boards will be named "Boards". Additionally, Local Workforce Development Agencies will be named "local agencies". Hopefully, this common definition encompasses the wide array of local workforce development systems.

Selling Points of Rapid Response

Building on success is a time-honored marketing technique. Rapid Response provides benefits to employees, companies and communities. These benefits include:

Rapid Response speeds up outplacement services. By direct employee contact, Rapid Response decreases the time employees are unemployed. This quick re-employment minimizes income loss to the employee and the employee's family. When employees become re-employed, the employer may benefit by reduced unemployment payments taxes. The community benefits when employees can pay taxes and require fewer community services.

Rapid Response organizes the outplacement activity. Rapid Response oversight and management of outplacement activities enables company staff to concentrate on other activities. These activities may include negotiating severance pay, educational funds and other resources that can contribute to the Rapid Response program.

Rapid Response stabilizes the employee-employer environment. By fostering cooperation during this event, Rapid Response may serve as a hallmark for the community response. A community's business, labor, and service groups can pull together in a crisis around Rapid Response. Prospective businesses and investors are attracted by a community approach to workforce development.

Rapid Response helps maintain productivity. Worker productivity and quality can drop when morale decreases. Rapid Response activities help to sustain morale. By offering services, especially on-site, workers can take positive steps to new jobs. Rapid Response participation leads to less absenteeism and productivity remains high. Additionally, Rapid Response participation can reduce the possibility of employee sabotage, etc.

Rapid Response provides a communication path. Rapid Response is a forum for the employer and employees to discuss and develop outplacement strategies. The parties can reach consensus on the best approaches for all concerned. Rapid Response also provides a central information source about jobs, training opportunities and related concerns. This reliable information helps dispel rumors and provides answers to individual questions.

Rapid Response helps deliver services to the employee. Rapid Response establishes partnerships with local organizations. These partnerships are the basis for a comprehensive employee adjustment program. Rapid Response serves as a liaison between employees and service providers. Rapid Response brings a focal point for planning the next step. These next steps are then communicated to the employees.

Rapid Response personalizes services. Rapid Response fosters a case management approach to training and outplacement. Each employee's needs and interests are assessed. The employee then selects services to meet those needs. Assistance is tailored to meet individual circumstances.

Rapid Response is the right thing to do. Company closings and layoffs pose great hardships on employees, employers and communities. Relieving the effects of dislocation through cooperation fostered through Rapid Response is a positive and responsible way to help lighten these hardships.

Who benefits by Rapid Response?

The simple answer is the employer, the employees, the community and the state. While all four of these groups benefit from Rapid Response services, they do not benefit equally.

Services to Employees

Rapid Response focuses the primary benefits on the affected employees. This focus ensures that the employees receive the information and services they need to secure new jobs. This manual includes text, sample forms and other tools to best assess and meet the needs of impacted employees.

Benefits to Employers

Employer benefits are less tangible but no less real and important. The employer receives assistance in addressing the needs of its workforce. While many employers may pay other entities to provide similar services, Rapid Response services are provided at no cost to the employer.

Additionally, most employers consider layoffs and/or closures to be very stressful for management as well as their non-management employees. Employers can use Rapid Response to provide expert assistance to their employees. The employer may not be able to provide these services to their employees without Rapid Response assistance.

When companies close for financial reasons, employers may lack the funds to help employees. Additionally, many employers simply do not know what they can do to assist their employees. Historically, most employers have readily accepted the services and benefits that are available through Rapid Response.

Employers receive positive press coverage due to their efforts to ensure their employees are helped. Production may not decline as much if employees can maintain a positive attitude about securing new employment.

Benefits to the Community

The community benefits in several ways. The employees view the community positively for helping them re-establish their lives positively. The community achieves success by helping employees get back to work. These re-employed workers will add to the community tax base and reduce community support costs. New employers are encouraged to locate in the community when employees are shown in a positive light (e.g., highly skilled workforce, skills upgraded and professional diversity).

Benefits to the State

The State can receive positive feedback from employers, employees, unions, elected officials and the general public. The State is viewed as responsible, pro-active and supportive of the citizens and their families.

Who Provides Rapid Response Activities?

Local Options

The State wants to insure maximum flexibility in the local design of workforce development programs. Rapid Response works in much the same way. Under WIA, the state is responsible for organizing Rapid Response activities while the Workforce Development Agencies actually provide services. Agencies may choose three options for delivery of Rapid Response:

1. **Joint State and Local Rapid Response Effort**
2. **Local Rapid Response Effort**
3. **Local Rapid Response Effort with State Technical Assistance**

State Responsibility

The State Rapid Response Section is accountable for the program to the Governor, Elected Officials and other concerned parties. The State Rapid Response section receives the WARN notices. When the notice is received, the State Rapid Response coordinator will contact the local agency. Together, the State and local agencies will discuss the best approach to the event. The local agency may want the State staff present for the initial meeting with the employer. Based upon the outcome of this meeting, the local agency may choose to conduct the employee information sessions without State staff. Based upon the size and complexity, the best approach may be a State and Local effort. The local agency may opt to conduct all Rapid Response activities without State staff. However, the local agency may request technical assistance at any time during the process.

The State Rapid Response Section will continue to gather updated information. This updated information can be used to respond to the media, elected officials or other interested parties. Additionally, this information may provide the ability to gather best practices to share with other workforce development areas. Sharing best practices enhances the success of Rapid Response programs.

RAPID RESPONSE TEAMS

Creating a Local Rapid Response Team

Traditionally, Rapid Response activities have been carried out using a Team approach. Defining what a Rapid Response Team is, who the members are, and what it does is the first step in defining your local Rapid Response program. In creating a Rapid Response Team, as with any team, there must be a common goal. Simply stated:

"The Rapid Response goal is to provide services to employees who are being laid off. These services promote the re-employment of the employees into other quality jobs as quickly as possible."

Rapid Response teams are professionals in the employment and training field who represent a variety of programs to assist employees. Most teams provide for the functions of WIA, Unemployment Compensation, TANF, Wagner-Peyser services (Job matching), and other appropriate One-Stop partners. Potential team members may also include vocational schools, technical colleges and United Way agencies. Obviously, each community possesses many individuals, organizations and programs that could contribute to the effort.

The team coordinates available services and refers individuals directly to programs. As an example, if an employee needs a service that is available through a mental health agency, the Team will refer that employee to that local agency. The team member is charged with knowing about available services rather than the individual dislocated employee. While the employee still needs to be able to communicate his/her problem, the employee is not required to know which agency or program addresses that problem.

Who should be a member of your Rapid Response Team?

The Local Rapid Response Specialist

The local agency decides upon the appropriate membership of the local Rapid Response team. Also, the local agency identifies a local Rapid Response Specialist. This specialist may be the Director, manager or other designee. This specialist will serve as a primary contact and facilitator of service delivery in the local area. The specialist will be responsible for ensuring that the initial contact and the initial meeting occur with the employer.

Additionally, the local agency(s) should be clear that the Specialist and the team will be representing the local agency and the local elected officials to employees, companies and the community. The Team markets One-Stop services, WIA, and other programs to these important customers. The local agency may set expectations for these marketing efforts and also local guidelines. The local agency may choose to make event-based decisions as to whether on-site services are to be provided based on the requests of the company and employees (and union if applicable), the number of affected employees and the amount of time before the layoff occurs.

Rapid Response Specialist Skills

The Rapid Response specialist performs varied functions. The person who holds this job must be an excellent communicator and network builder. Indeed, the clarity with which the specialist explains Rapid Response's advantages to an employer and employee may determine whether a plan will be formed to address a dislocation.

For the Rapid Response effort to be comprehensive in scope, the Rapid Response specialist must also communicate with key people in the business and labor community and with community leaders even before the need for Rapid Response arises. In this way, the program is well organized with a wide base of support for the Rapid Response effort. This networking can provide the necessary links to ensure the successful outcome of the Rapid Response mission. It can also result in tangible, hands-on-benefits from an array of contributors once Rapid Response is started. The Rapid Response specialist should have a good understanding of available employment and training services already in place.

A background in improving employer and employee relationships may also prove essential. This is especially important at locations where a history of employer and employee dispute or an ongoing negotiation can affect the employee adjustment effort. The Rapid Response effort will, of course, bring together organizations and individuals with various perspectives on the delivery of services to dislocated employees. The specialist takes the lead in negotiating and working out satisfactory arrangements to provide services despite turf battles. Finally, the specialist ensures that Rapid Response is meeting the local agency and elected officials designed goals and objectives. In the event of several layoffs, the specialist will need to be able to make a considerable time commitment to ensure these goals are achieved. Thus, the Rapid Response specialist must also be a good time manager, team player and diplomat.

As part of the Rapid Response team, the following types of information will generally be made available to employees and employers during on-site presentations.

Labor Exchange Opportunities

Job Matching - The One-Stop representative explains the job matching systems. These systems provide services to thousands of Ohioans each year. Job seekers can receive assistance with their job search efforts through an automated job matching system that connects the skills of job seekers with job order specifications of available job openings. Additional tools available through the One-Stop system to assist job seekers include: Internet access to job listings (county, statewide and nationally) and other activities such as resume writing software and assistance, newspapers, and job posting bulletin boards.

Employer Services - The One-Stop representative will explain how the local agency continues to take job-opening orders and perform job-matching services to assist Ohio's employers in finding qualified employees. The One-Stop representative will explain how this translates into job opportunities for many dislocated employees.

Labor Market Information – The One-Stop representative explains about the wide variety of publications and products that are available locally and nationally to assist individuals in making career decisions. Such information may include locally or nationally developed forecasts for Occupational Projections, Shortage and Surplus Occupations, Demand Occupations, Wage and Skill Requirements for Occupations and Unemployment data. The information may be available through hard copy or via the Internet.

Trade Adjustment Assistance Program (TAA) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Programs - The One-Stop representative explains the basic requirements for petitioning or submitting an application for certification for these programs. Individuals who are determined to be eligible for these programs may receive additional education and training benefits funded through these programs, in addition to WIA services, if their layoff is certified by the U.S. Department of Labor to have met the criteria for approval of the petition.

Unemployment Compensation

Under WIA, unemployment compensation program information will be provided to impacted employees, employers and other interested individuals. As part of the Rapid Response team, the following types of information concerning unemployment compensation will generally be made available to employees and employers during on-site presentations.

Unemployment Compensation – The Unemployment Compensation (UC) representative will explain the requirements associated with this program, including such items as the effect that severance pay may have on the eligibility of individuals to receive up to 26 weeks of cash payments. The UC representative will also secure information from the employer that will assist the state in determining the employees eligibility for UC benefits. This individual will also be responsible for arranging any special services for mass registration for benefits (e.g., telephone, mail in claims, etc.)

Local Unemployment Compensation Staff - The UC representative from the One-Stop will explain and arrange for the registration for unemployment compensation benefits of the employees when they are laid off.

Workforce Development Representative

The WIA program will be represented locally by at least one organization. The local WIA representative(s) is responsible for having information about what services are available through the Workforce Investment Act in the local area. As part of the Rapid Response team, this individual will be responsible for providing this information on what services are available during on-site presentations to employers and employees.

The WIA representative will also represent a link to other services available to employees and employers. The local representative will discuss the possibility of providing on-site services such as: job placement assistance workshops, the establishment of a transition center or establishing an adjustment committee. Through the evaluation of the skills and barriers to employment of the affected employees, the local representative will make an initial assessment of the service needs of the employees including the possible need for re-training. The local WIA representative may initiate a request for additional funds to provide needed services either from the state or federal government if it appears the needs of the affected workforce exceed the available funds locally. Though the principal provider of WIA services, the local WIA representative will also be aware of other services and resources available in the community which could be of benefit to the employees.

Adding Members to Maximize Resources

Additional members may be added to the Rapid Response team. After making an initial assessment of the worker's service needs, additional members can be included to maximize worker's services. Also, you may refer employees who need these services to the community agency providing the service. Every effort should be made to maximize the resources of all of the One-Stop partners. An excellent additional resource is the Prevention, Retention and Contingency (PRC) fund with its broad discretionary authority and flexibility to assist people. Additionally, the Workforce Development system should include other programs that could best benefit the dislocated employees and their families. For example, the insurance program for children of low-income families can be of major benefit to many employees. The local Rapid Response specialist needs a basic knowledge and understanding of the full range of services available through other programs in the area. This should result in the inclusion of other community resources and services being made available, as appropriate, to assist in meeting the needs of an affected workforce.

When does Rapid Response occur?

Rapid Response should occur as soon as the job loss is verified. This verification can be based upon information ranging from a rumor to an official public announcement released by the company. Notification is often received from the employer as a result of the employer complying with its responsibility for the filing of a notice as required by the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act.

In these cases, there is usually a 60-day notice given to the employees and the State prior to the employer initiating the closing or layoff. This 60-day period permits the Rapid Response team to arrange for the provision of WIA and other services while the employees are still employed. The 60-day window permits Rapid Response staff not only to provide information about the programs and services available, but also to better mobilize and coordinate assistance adapted to the specific layoff or closure.

Sufficient lead-time is a key element in developing a successful approach to a layoff or closure. The amount of lead-time to coordinate and provide services before the employee becomes separated can directly impact the length of time the worker is unemployed.

Rapid Response promotes the concept of voluntary notice of impending layoffs and company closures in advance of the required 60 days. Employers may recognize the value of early intervention services. Some employers may also be required to provide notice by a collective bargaining agreement. Rapid Response seeks notice of future employment changes as far in advance as possible.

Historically, an on-site contact with the employer and employee representatives was expected to occur within 48 hours of the state or local area receiving notification of a current or projected permanent closing or layoff. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) emphasizes that services be delivered quickly in order for employees to secure new employment as soon as possible.

Some of the ways that information of a closing or layoff can be received include: local news articles, phone contact from individually affected employees, or contact by local agency representatives. In these cases, once notice of a closing or layoff becomes available, community planning and Rapid Response can begin.

Which employees are eligible?

Warned or "At-Risk" Employees

Rapid Response services are available to employers and employees who have or will experience a company closure or permanent layoff. Employees who receive job loss information by WARN or by "Public Announcement" are considered "At-Risk" employees. These At-Risk employees are eligible for Rapid Response services.

Dislocated Employees

Once the employee becomes unemployed, the employee becomes a "Dislocated Employee". Before an individual can receive intensive and training services, the employee must meet the eligibility requirements for the WIA dislocated employee program.

Dislocated Employee Eligibility Definition

A dislocated employee is an individual who meets the definitional requirements specified in WIA Section 101 (9). Paraphrasing these requirements, a dislocated employee is an individual who:

- Has been laid off or received a notice of layoff, is unlikely to be able to return to a previous industry or occupation and is either (a) eligible for or exhausted unemployment compensation, or (b) has demonstrated substantial attachment to the labor force;
- Has been terminated or laid off, or received a notice of termination or layoff as a result of a permanent closure or substantial layoff at a plant, facility or enterprise;
- Was self-employed but is unemployed as a result of general economic conditions or a natural disaster; or
- Is a displaced homemaker

STATE RAPID RESPONSE SECTION

Since the inception of WIA, the responsibility of the State Rapid Response Section is "to provide for" as distinguished from "to provide" such services. The State Rapid Response Section coordinates local services providers, ensures employees receive the necessary services.

The State Rapid Response may use Rapid Response funds for discretionary allocations. Discretionary funds may be used for core, intensive and training services. Also, to provide additional assistance to areas that experience large layoffs, closures or a substantial increase in the number of dislocated employees. These Rapid Response funds will be expended in accordance with federal policy, state policy and the local area plan.

The State Rapid Response Section coordinates statewide efforts to address the effects of company closings and layoffs. Other responsibilities include oversight and program preparation in advance of layoffs. Additionally, the Rapid Response Section begins addressing the dislocated employees needs and impacted communities who experience plant closings or layoffs. This Rapid Response Section's duties include the following activities:

Rapid Response Assistance – If the local Rapid Response specialist requests assistance, the Rapid Response Section will assess the need for coordinate, and may initially arrange for Rapid Response services to be provided to a specific company/workers. The Rapid Response Section also coordinates information and access to other benefits and resources that affected employees are eligible to receive (e.g., unemployment benefits, Trade Adjustment Assistance program, job training, labor market information, career counseling and job placement assistance).

Labor Consultation – The Rapid Response Section works with One-Stop partners to insure that consultation with labor organizations occurs when a substantial number of union members will be affected. The Rapid Response Section shares best practices with local partners to foster employer and employee cooperation to better assist the affected employees. Where a union is involved in a dislocation, Rapid Response will attempt to support and view the union as a valuable resource to assist the workers involved in the downsizing.

Program Administration - The Rapid Response Section will maintain a reporting system to provide adequate information for effective program management. The Rapid Response Section will support local Rapid Response activity and the subsequent delivery of core, intensive and training services and assess the need for additional funding to address a dislocation event. This support can lead to increased effectiveness at the community and State level to meet the needs of an affected workforce.

Technical Assistance – As part of the Rapid Response Section's on-going coordination, technical assistance is provided to augment local employment strategies when requested by local partners. The Rapid Response Section also serves as a liaison and clearinghouse for specific dislocation events. Job loss information and available services are communicated to employers, individual employees, elected officials, other state agencies, media and other parties. Information on "best practices what works" will be shared with local areas as one means of providing this assistance.

Coordination, Management and Averting Layoffs

Under WIA, the State is responsible for providing Rapid Response activities. WIA legislation/regulations are silent as to specifically how the Rapid Response responsibility will be carried out. WIA states that:

"Statewide Rapid Response assistance activities will include, among other things, the provision of Rapid Response activities, carried out in local areas by an entity designated by the State, working in conjunction with the local Agencies and the chief elected officials in the local area."

As part of the Rapid Response Team objectives, the State's Rapid Response staff will provide information and facilitate access to available public programs and services, including the provision of additional funds in emergency situations.

Local Rapid Response activities are provided based upon the description of the Rapid Response program contained in each local area WIA plan. These plans define the agencies, resources and actions that will be involved in providing Rapid Response services at the local level. During the initial on-site contact with the company by the Rapid Response Team, a plan or strategy is developed which customizes the information, resources, and services available and timetable to follow in providing the services to address the downsizing. This strategy will describe actions planned by the Rapid Response Team and local community to meet the individual circumstances and needs of the employees affected by the closing or layoff.

Information collection to identify job loss is allowable as a Rapid Response activity. This may include information-sharing agreements with local business or labor groups chambers of commerce, or other organizations. These entities may have access to information about potential dislocations in the local area well in advance of the official WARN notice. This information concerning a closing or layoff may be available long before the official WARN notice is ever received by the State Rapid Response Section.

The Rapid Response Team, after going on-site to the company and explaining the services available, should understand what resources, staff, and time are to be contributed by the employer and the employees themselves to assist in their transition to other employment. This is particularly important when it is agreed that a Rapid Response service plan is to be developed. Some of the areas to be considered may include:

- ❑ Company provided on-site space for early intervention services, possibly including basic services (i.e., WIA core services) or for the establishment of an on-site transition center.

- ❑ Provision by the company of release time for its employees.

- ❑ Employee availability prior to layoff to participate in WIA core activities focused on re-employment.

- ❑ Employee commitment to participate in an employee needs survey.

- ❑ The commitment by the employer and union (if available) to recruit employees to participate in planned activities.

STEPS IN RAPID RESPONSE

STEP 1: IDENTIFY AND VERIFY JOB LOSS.

- ❑ Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Notices from Employers.
- ❑ Informal Notice of Layoffs (i.e. newspaper article, rumors).
- ❑ Call from Company.

STEP 2: SET UP AN INITIAL MEETING WITH THE COMPANY, UNION AND THE RAPID RESPONSE TEAM.

- ❑ Identify the employees' skills, wages, severance packages.
- ❑ Identify challenges to employees' re-employment.
- ❑ Present adjustment services.
- ❑ Sell the Committee model.
- ❑ Explain the Rapid Response goals.

STEP 3: DELIVER EMPLOYEE INFORMATION SESSIONS.

- ❑ Explain services available through the One-Stop Center.
- ❑ Market community programs and services.
- ❑ Conduct an Employee Needs Survey and perform analysis.

STEP 4: IDENTIFY LOCAL AND REGIONAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES.

- ❑ Use the survey analysis to identify employee needs.
- ❑ Address identified needs with available services.
- ❑ Identify employee skills that readily transfer to available job openings.

STEP 5: DELIVER SERVICES TO HELP EMPLOYEES FIND NEW JOBS.

- ❑ Identify the community and local agency goals of the program.
- ❑ Identify activities that will lead to the workers re-employment
- ❑ Create a timeline to deliver these activities.
- ❑ Track employee's progress throughout the activities to re-employment.

STEP 6: MARKET THE WORKFORCE.

- ❑ Develop a workforce marketing strategy.
- ❑ Employer outreach to other potential employers.
- ❑ Involve the union (if available) in finding the workers jobs.
- ❑ Utilize and link to local economic development resources and efforts.
- ❑ Encourage the involvement of the community in locating available job openings.

STEP 1: VERIFY THE JOB LOSS & GATHER INFORMATION

Rapid Response begins when a potential job loss or closing is discovered. This discovery can be prompted by both formal and/or informal information. In 1989, the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act required employers to file an official notice of a minimum of 60 days in advance of a closing or mass layoff. This met the legal requirements of the WARN Act. Job loss is also a routine subject often present on television, in newspapers and through the radio. Rapid Response gathers this "layoff" news and "responds" to the impacted employers, employees, and communities.

Advance Notice

Advance notice provides the employees and the workforce development system with time to plan and deliver services to address the closing or layoff. The employees have the time while still employed to learn about and to access these services and hopefully become re-employed sooner.

Newspaper Announcements and Rumors

Every hint that a closing or layoff is occurring should be followed up on and verified. Some firms may file a notice "just to be on the safe side" and then modify or even withdraw it later A telephone call to the employer will help to clarify the situation. In addition to the local rumor mill, WARN notices and the newspapers; Rapid Response uses the following as sources for finding out about potential business closings:

- ❑ Chamber of commerce
- ❑ Local Workforce Agencies
- ❑ Local Elected Officials
- ❑ Local government and community agencies
- ❑ Union officials
- ❑ Individual workers
- ❑ General public

Steps to verify job loss:

1. Is the notice or rumor real?
2. Is the closing/layoff inevitable?
3. How many employees are affected?
4. Who are the key management and union leaders?
5. Who should Rapid Response contact?

Evaluate the Employer and Employee relationship

Rapid Response works well in environments where employers and employees have a history of cooperation and mutual respect. Before making the initial contact, the Rapid Response specialist should find out:

- ♦ Is the organization involved in "affects" or collective bargaining negotiations?
- ♦ If a union is present, has the relationship between the union and management been cooperative?

- If there is no union, are there established employee organizations that have worked cooperatively with management?

Each organization has its own corporate culture, that is, a set of standards, beliefs, and relationships that govern the way the organization "really works." By being aware that organizations have this dual, both formal, and informal structure the Rapid Response specialist will want to have several questions answered before going on-site. Such as:

1. Who are the key officials in the organization? What do they know about employer and employee relations? What are their basic attitudes toward such relations?
2. What do the key officials believe to be the respective employer and union responsibilities for employee outplacement?
3. Who are the real opinion leaders, whether official or unofficial, within the organization? Are there key people in the organization who should be actively involved in Rapid Response?
4. What is the best approach to take when trying to sell the idea of an adjustment committee in this particular environment?
5. What are the company and community pitfalls to avoid?

Make Contact with the Employer

The Rapid Response Team must be prepared in advance to make a presentation to an employer on the value of Rapid Response at the initial meeting. The interested employer is requested to include any union or employee representatives at this meeting so they can also learn about Rapid Response services. Alternatively, the Rapid Response specialist can contact the employer or the employees individually.

In deciding who to contact and when, the Rapid Response specialist should consider the attitudes or advice of the managers and labor representatives at the affected worksite. For example, the Rapid Response specialist may learn that the manager at a local plant is not the final decision-maker. Only after consultation with local management officials, should the specialist make contact with either the chief corporate official at company headquarters or the person designated in the WARN notice. This process of who to contact may also work conversely whereby the corporate contact person indicated on the WARN is non-responsive so you will proceed with attempting to contact company representatives on-site.

A similar approach should be made to the local union leadership. If it becomes necessary to get in touch with higher officials in the union structure at the state or national level, such contacts should be made after consultation with the local community and efforts to reach the local union leadership have been unsuccessful.

STEP 2: THE INITIAL COMPANY MEETING

Employers are not required to provide Rapid Response activities to employees. The employer can deny the Rapid Response team access to employees. The employer needs to be convinced or sold on the program's benefits. Once convinced or sold, the employer will usually allow Rapid Response access to the employees. In most cases, the employer is relieved to find helping partners. However, the employer may say "No" if the initial meeting fails. Failed meetings can occur for the following reasons:

- Team members are late or unprofessional
- Tension among Rapid Response team members
- Too many team members in attendance
- Agenda is poorly organized or executed
- Meeting goals are unclear
- Value of services not clearly shown
- Poor or bureaucratic presentations
- Employers/unions needs are not addressed
- Excess probing for company information
- Meeting takes too long

- **See Appendix: 2: How to Pitch a Better Meeting**

Attending the Employer Meeting

The employer, union and individual employees are overwhelmed when too many team members present information. The initial meeting with the employer includes a small delegation (3 or less). This small delegation can then convene an “information meeting” to brief the larger community team.

Initial meeting topics should include:

- Explain One Stop Center & other services available.
- Explain the advantages of early intervention
- Explain the Adjustment Committee option.
- Schedule employee information sessions.

Selling Points to the Employer and Union

The Rapid Response marketing approach is adjusted to meet the needs of the employer and employee representatives. The Rapid Response Team must be sensitive to the pressures on everyone. Layoffs usually affect both employees and managers, potentially including the chief executive officer. Throughout the transition, everyone will need to continue to fill work orders or operations while preparing for the shutdown or cutback. The following benefits are attractive to both employees and management:

Rapid Response can help reduce administrative burdens. Frequently organizations do not have personnel who can be assigned to manage the dislocation while carrying on normal operations. Even those firms with a large human resources staff may lack the expertise to manage a dislocation event. Rapid Response can assume the administrative and management functions associated with retraining and outplacement of the affected workers and relieve the company of any over burden associated with these tasks.

Rapid Response can help maintain productivity. Maintaining productivity is in the interest of both management and the employees. As a communication forum and a source of rumor control, the Rapid Response effort can address employee concerns. Support of Rapid Response also can show a corporate commitment to the employees, a commitment that can help sustain employee morale. Both factors can help maintain productivity, reduce absenteeism, minimize employee errors, and reduce deliberate acts of sabotage.

Rapid Response helps preserve corporate and union images. A cooperative employer-employee response tailored to the needs of the individual employees’ projects a responsible image. This is important because organizations need to retain and attract employee to meet their current and future needs at this location or others the company may have. Unions can retain credibility with their members in that they are seen as being proactive in assisting the workers.

Rapid Response can help reduce worker’s compensation claims. Maintaining employee morale helps reduce the incidence of on-the-job accidents, which in turn reduces employee compensation claims. Workers who have information about their options for the future are more inclined to keep their minds on their job. This focus leads to safer performance of their job duties.

On-Site Team Assessment

The Rapid Response team performs a preliminary assessment of the need for services. This initial assessment may also include arranging for a survey of the employees to evaluate their individual educational and job skill levels. At this point, the Team can determine what other agencies and organizations should be included to deliver services. The on-site initial assessment should explore:

- The appropriateness of filing a petition for TAA or NAFTA certification,

- Appropriateness and availability of community services such as the United Way and mental health assistance,
- The transferability of employee skills to other jobs,
- Potential for employee placement into existing job openings in the area,
- The need for employees to receive requiring retraining to return to work, and
- The need for additional state or federal resources.

What are the employee qualifications?

The Rapid Response team collects or confirms information about the characteristics of the workforce. This information is gathered first during the initial meeting. With this information, the presentation on services to the employer and union can be better customized to meet the needs and individual circumstances involving the dislocation. You will want to obtain information at the initial meeting include:

- ❑ Size and schedule of layoffs
- ❑ General characteristics of workforce, including jobs affected, seniority levels, and wage levels
- ❑ Perspectives and attitudes towards employer and employee relations
- ❑ Cause of layoff/closure
- ❑ Employer, employee and other possible contributions to readjustment effort which can supplement what the Rapid Response Team can provide

- ***See Appendix 3: Employee Qualifications Worksheet***

Gain Agreement for Rapid Response

At the initial meeting, the employer and employee representatives should agree to support the Rapid Response effort. This agreement establishes a climate of understanding, trust, and consensus. A speedy decision to support the effort is particularly critical when the lead-time prior to a layoff is compressed. The agreement should establish the mix and level of financial support that will be made available toward Rapid Response. Companies should identify their contribution to the effort to include such items as equipment, facilities, or company paid time for the workers to participate in Rapid Response sponsored activities.

Employer Decisions

At the meeting, explain Rapid Response goals and objectives. Include an explanation of what activities and services can be provided to assist the affected workers:

If the employer agrees to support the Rapid Response activities, schedule the Employee Information Sessions.

If the employer does not agree to Rapid Response activities, identify an alternative way to get services to the employees. Alternate methods to increase employee awareness of services is via newspaper articles, hosting community information sessions, utilizing union communication vehicles, or doing a direct mailing to each affected workers home if their addresses can be obtained from the employer.

STEP 3: CONDUCT THE EMPLOYEE INFORMATION SESSIONS.

Goals

- ❑ Explain One-Stop Center services

- ❑ Market other community resources and services
- ❑ Describe how employees can access services (i.e. One-Stop Center, etc.)
- ❑ Communicate potential activities planned to assist workers
- ❑ Conduct an Employee Needs Survey
- ❑ Answer questions about services that workers may ask

This meeting informs employees about the Rapid Response program and goals. Employees will receive basic information on available programs and services. Employees will also receive contact information on how to access these resources and services. At the meeting, the Rapid Response Team members provide appropriate technical information about available programs, resources and services. This information may include an overview of WIA, eligibility for unemployment benefits, welfare payments, food stamps, and services offered by such agencies as the veterans administration, the small business administration, and the department of housing and urban development.

Ideally the meeting should include both management and hourly workers. The meeting should be held at a time and place convenient to all employees. If various shifts are to be affected, each shift may need a separate meeting. If several shifts are going to be affected by the dislocation, the meetings can usually be held on the same day. This strategy reduces the chance of misinformation circulating among the employees since they will all hear the same thing at their individual meeting the same day.

If the employer is unwilling or unable to provide space for a general employee meeting, other locations are identified. Other possible locations include union meeting hall, a local library, church, or other buildings, which are big enough to accommodate the workforce.

Covered Topics

- ♦ Describe Rapid Response
- ♦ Introduce the Rapid Response team
- ♦ Describe job openings and skill level requirements within the community and the region
- ♦ Provide basic and specific unemployment benefit information concerning the dislocation
- ♦ Distribute printed material on services and local agency contacts including addresses and phone numbers
- ♦ Explain what services and resources are available to assist the workers
- ♦ Answer questions and obtain feedback from attendees on concerns and needs

Assessing Employee Needs

Rapid Response is an opportunity to provide customized adjustment services to address a specified dislocation event. An employee survey can provide information to better establish this customized approach. The employee survey can obtain skill and education level information about the employees. The survey helps identify employee concerns and needs concerning the dislocation. The employees can also indicate their plans and preparation for future employment. This aggregate information is very valuable for program planning and design. The Rapid Response team should make every attempt to get every affected employee to complete a survey. The more survey data you can get the better you can predict what services the workers need.

Reasons for conducting an employee needs survey:

- ♦ Analyze the skills of employees
- ♦ Identify the employees' priority for available services

- Identify local job opportunities for employees with transferable skills
- Enhance program planning and design to address a dislocation event

Suggestions for gaining 100-percent participation in completing a needs survey include:

- ❑ Have employees' hand in completed surveys when they pick up their paychecks and then collect them from the employer.
- ❑ Ask employees to fill out and submit surveys at the employee meeting (make sure you have pencils/pens available)
  (Note: some employees may have reading and writing difficulty. The Team should make provisions for addressing this issue).
- ❑ Personally contact anyone who does not return a survey. The employer and union access the workers on the job if possible.

See Appendix 5: Sample Employee Needs Survey

See Appendix 6: Sample Survey Analysis

STEP 4: IDENTIFY RESOURCES

- ❑ Use the Survey Analysis to identify employee needs.
- ❑ Match identified needs to available services and resources.
- ❑ Identify current employee skills that transfer to job openings.

Assess One-Stop Resources

Look at all of the available resources, benefits and services that might be pulled together to enhance the success of Rapid Response. Services that can go into a comprehensive job adjustment package include:

Skill testing and assessment

Labor market and career counseling

Resume and cover letter development

Job search skills training or workshops

Job placement assistance

Training or retraining (vocational, technical, and on-the-job)

Basic education (such as literacy, ESL training, GED, and remedial classes)

Budget an financial management counseling

Stress management and mental health services

Temporary financial assistance

Develop a plan of action

- ❑ Schedule activities.
- ❑ Schedule the provision of services.
- ❑ Determine methods for tracking employee progress.
- ❑ Follow up to evaluate results of intervention efforts.

The Rapid Response team develops a plan of action for the entire employee adjustment effort. Using the employee survey results, Rapid Response can better identify the types and need for each kind of service.

One of the best practices for establishing this plan is to design activities around 6 critical groupings of needs. These topical needs include Jobs, Communication, Education, Financial, Social and Emotional. The Team can create at least 5 activities around each of these need areas. By doing so, the intervention program will become very comprehensive and compliment the service delivery capacity.

STEP 5:DELIVER SERVICES TO HELP EMPLOYEES FIND NEW JOBS.

- ❑ Identify the community and local agency goals of the program
- ❑ Identify activities that lead to workforce re-employment
- ❑ Create a timeline to deliver the activities and services necessary for re-employment
- ❑ Track employees progress toward re-employment

Establish a Strategic Plan

The first task facing the Rapid Response team is to develop a plan to address the dislocation event. This plan should include the development of implementation steps. These steps should identify fiscal and staff resources at the state and local levels. Implementation steps should include access to all available training and education resources and information. The steps should outline when WIA intensive or training services will be offered as part of the overall service delivery plan of the Rapid Response Team.

Board and Local Agency Oversight

The Rapid Response team briefs the local agency and the Board on the progress and success of the program. This follow-up should emphasize the meeting planned deadlines. The Specialist can also provide employee feedback about the program. The local agency will be invaluable in suggesting enhancements or solutions to issues or problems affecting the worker adjustment effort. Additionally, the local agency may assist with press coverage of the program's results. Communication amongst everyone in the local area will keep the program responsive to the changing needs of the impacted employees. These steps prepare for the program phase – Marketing the Workforce.

STEP 6: WORKFORCE MARKETING

The Rapid Response team markets the workforce to potential employers. When the employees are ready to compete for new jobs, the Team can focus on broadcasting the employee skills to potential employers. This effort will help insure that the maximum numbers of employees become re-employed.

Identify Key Audiences

Members of the Rapid Response team can make presentations to business groups such as local Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Club, etc. These presentations can help inform prospective employers of the availability and skill levels of an affected workforce. Employers can provide feedback on where the jobs are and the qualifications needed to secure them. Many business organizations have newsletters. These newsletters may provide a way to market the affected workforce to potential new employers. Luncheon presentations and public speaking engagements can keep businesses informed on the importance of community involvement in getting the dislocated employees back to work.

Among the Audiences to Reach are:

- ♦ Area employer and employee committees, which have direct ties to companies and unions in the community.

- Labor organizations at the national, state, and local levels, which can reach specific employers. This audience is particularly effective at identifying jobs that match the skill and experience levels of specific groups of employees.
- Trade and civic organizations with business representatives. The local Chamber of Commerce is probably the most important business representative in the community. Many business people are also individual members of such service organizations as the Rotary, Shriners, and Kiwanis clubs.
- Community organizations such as the United Way are always interested to learn how they might help the affected workers find jobs.
- Professional and industry specific associations keep members informed of developments in their fields (i.e. new company startups or job openings). The Society for Human Resource Management, for example, can provide information on potential job opportunities in the Human Resources field.
- The local workforce development agency and Governor's Boards, which can get the Rapid Response message out to their constituents-the business, labor, and employment and training communities concerning the availability of dislocated employers.
- State and local economic development agencies, whose work to attract new businesses to the area is greatly enhanced when they can include a ready, skilled workforce, either soon to be dislocated, or recently dislocated, to fill the jobs a new business creates.

Closure

All of these activities and plans culminate in employee placement into new jobs. As the Team continues to track progress towards replacing jobs, the Team can assess the value of the different approaches and actions. This assessment contributes to "fine-tuning" the Rapid Response process in your community.

Although each layoff will have unique features and characteristics, the Team will become more confident in its ability to transcend the challenge. Although the work is challenging, the rewards are great. Employees and their families can regain their lives and move on to a new future.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE RAPID RESPONSE

Early Intervention Is Critical!

Displaced employees are much more likely to take part in adjustment projects that begin before a plant closing or major layoff rather than afterward. While still employed but after being notified of a closing/layoff, the employee has the time and opportunity to review its options and personal needs. It is at this point that employees need information on available resources. Based upon previous experience, once the employee is separated from the company it becomes much more difficult to provide meaningful services to them.

When employees receive early notification of a closure or layoff, it is generally thought that one-third of affected employees are able to independently make productive decisions and take immediate actions about their future. For the other two-thirds of the employees, information, early assistance and participation by employees in assistance efforts prior to the dislocation can have positive results in terms of the individual employee's ability to handle the adjustment and their attitude towards the closing/layoff. Additionally, the time between being laid off and securing new employment can be reduced.

Early notification and early intervention of the Rapid Response team to prepare and organize an effective program to assist employees before they become demoralized by the pending closing/layoff is very important. This has a further positive impact on their work environment and their overall ability to address the layoff. By each individual employee knowing in advance what is happening to him/her and what options he/she has, they have the opportunity to avoid making disastrous financial decisions in the context of job loss, and can better identify and evaluate a wider range of options regarding their future.

Cooperation and Participation

Once a company publicly announces that it will close or layoff employees, the level of cooperation and coordination achieved as part of Rapid Response can have a major affect on the success of the employees securing new quality employment. Employers can provide facilities, contacts and advertising resources to make the job search activity for displaced employees a company-wide, internally driven strategy. This can be coordinated with shift schedules and employee availability while still on-site and even in some cases while still on the clock. These options are often achieved through bargaining and/or cooperation between the company and employees. Employees increase their prospects for securing new employment by undertaking job search while they are still employed and at the work site.

Active participation and cooperation by unions or other employee representatives contributes to a greater level of acceptance and trust by affected employees. Thus, there is a greater likelihood that employees will utilize the services recommended by the Rapid Response Team.

Cooperation between local community entities is extremely important because of the wide array of resources and services these public and private organizations may be able to provide to employees. Effective coordination is particularly important to avoid duplication and employee confusion as well as to maximize the effective utilization of resources.

Programs Should Offer a Full Range of Options

Good programs need to offer a full range of options to meet the different needs and conditions presented by each dislocation. Programs should be able to provide individual employees with career planning, based upon an assessment of the employee's background, needs and skills.

Programs may also need to offer personal financial planning, as it is often a major concern of most employees facing a layoff. The local program should offer a full menu of job search skills training and assistance strategies, including OJT and active job development, as an essential part of a good program. This is particularly true where a large number of the affected employees have not changed jobs or been in the job-seeking labor force for several years and may not be accustomed to looking for a job. If the employees have not been actively in the job market they may not be familiar with the numerous resources, job search techniques and tools available to them (e.g., use of the Internet). They may also need to practice their interviewing techniques and develop a resume.

Additionally, basic skill remediation can be extremely important where significant numbers of blue-collar employees who have worked in somewhat narrowly defined jobs are affected. Experience indicates that approximately 20% of displaced employees need basic skill remediation. Providing access to basic skills training, GED preparation training and GED testing are often beneficial for those dislocated employees who do not have a high-school diploma or GED.

Occupational skills training is also an important feature of effective programs if the training offered is well designed and matches the individual dislocated employee's skills, needs, and background, and is directly related to available employment opportunities in the local and/or accessible labor market(s). Program experience indicates that up to 33% of affected employees will be interested in retraining in order to increase their competitiveness in the labor-market and to qualify for more rewarding employment.