

# Massachusetts Wisdom Works Job Search Techniques Training Program Manual

*September 2010 Edition  
Executive Office of Elder Affairs*

*Based upon the Marblehead Council on Aging's  
2009 Pilot Program Model*

Massachusetts Wisdom Works Program Manual  
– A Job Search Techniques Training Workshop –  
*based upon the Marblehead Council on Aging’s Pilot Program Model*

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Introduction

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Councils on Aging perform various duties for their members. A key service that will become increasingly relevant -- job search techniques training -- will allow members to rejoin the workforce, earn additional income, and receive the psychological benefits of employment. Searching for full time or part time jobs can be difficult for several reasons.

Here are some of the obstacles standing in the way of 55+ members obtaining employment.

1. The methods and techniques of searching for employment have changed dramatically since the days when your members searched for their previous jobs.
  - a. Methods have changed. Today, according to RetirementJobs.com, 85% of all jobs are posted only on the internet. Many adults may not know how to use the internet or how to best utilize it to find new work.
  - b. Job search techniques have changed. For example, résumé formatting has changed over the years.
2. The importance of social networking has increased over time. We really need to seek jobs via social networks -- ads and unions alone are not enough.
3. Older job applicants must develop savvy methods for dealing with age biases. Job search techniques training help adults to re-shape their résumé in a way that plays down age issues and learn how to deal with questions about being overqualified. (In fact, older workers can often be more reliable than younger workers!)
4. Psychological barriers can mount quickly for someone who has been laid off. If someone is 55+ and has been recently laid off, he or she may lack the confidence to follow through on a new job search process. For example, he or she may actually find an opening but be unwilling to send in the application or to call the potential employer.

To break down these barriers for mature older workers to find new employment, you can implement a job search techniques training program to help mature older workers rejoin the workforce. In the following sections, we will provide you the steps to replicate such a program.

On a larger scale, why does it matter that we promote the employment of older adults? The importance stems from the prediction that there will be a labor shortage in Massachusetts over the next decade. According to a brief from Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies released in 2005, all growth in Massachusetts’ working-

age population (16 and older) during 2005-2015 will come from the 55 and older population segment. Specifically, the number of people in Massachusetts who are 55+ will increase by 23% “while the number of 16-54 year olds in the population is projected to decline” by “2% over the same time period, despite the continued influx of new younger immigrants into the state”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Massachusetts will not only have an increasing number of mature workers, the Commonwealth will in fact have less younger workers. The brief concludes:

*“Massachusetts will be completely dependent on older workers to generate growth in its resident labor force over the coming decade. Massachusetts will be more dependent on older workers for their labor force than most other states across the nation”.*

Therefore, it is paramount that we find ways to mitigate the barriers currently inhibiting increased 55+ employment.<sup>2</sup>

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## Acknowledgements

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The ideas and insights for this manual were derived from conversations and interviews with Pat Roberts, the Director of the Marblehead Council on Aging (COA). Pat Roberts partnered with Clark Willmott, of Willmott and Associates, and Ralph Roberto and Jayne Mattson of Keystone Associates, to create a job search training program with hopes of attracting baby boomers to participate at the COA. In the spring of 2008, Roberts met with the President of Keystone Associates, an outplacement firm that helps people search for jobs after being laid off from their previous job. What resulted from their discussions and hard work was Marblehead’s “*Wisdom Works*”, a job search skills training program to help those who are 50+. The program consists of four weekly two-hour sessions, each one covering a different topic of the job search process, led by volunteers with backgrounds in human resources who then work with participants in small groups, training them how to find jobs. *Note:* Special thanks Eric Rosenberg, an intern in the 2009 Governor’s Community Outreach Internship Program, who interviewed Pat Roberts and worked on this manual.

### **Program Developer:**

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<sup>1</sup> Arana, Leonel and Andrew Sum. “The Graying Labor Force.” Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University. November 2005. Published in Research and Evaluation Brief. Commonwealth Corporation. Volume 3, Issue 3. Page 2.

<sup>2</sup> Arana, Leonel and Andrew Sum. “The Graying Labor Force.” Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University. November 2005. Published in Research and Evaluation Brief. Commonwealth Corporation. Volume 3, Issue 3. Page 3.

## Steps to Re-create the Massachusetts Wisdom Works Job Search Skills Training Program in Your Community

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The purpose of the Massachusetts Wisdom Works Job Search Skills Training Program is to help people who have the necessary job skills to re-enter in the workforce. The new job they seek does not have to be the same job, but should be a job that they can do effectively. The focus of your program should be on the job search process itself.

There are three categories of people that the Marblehead Job Search Techniques Training was designed for:

1. Those who have been actively seeking employment.
2. Those have been passively seeking employment. That is, they have not been searching for a job at all, but if you offered them a job, they would take it.
3. Those who will attend your program who merely have a general interest in the discussion. These people may or may not want to find employment or begin the search process, but desire to learn more about re-entering the workforce.

To run this program effectively, recruit a volunteer or designate a staff person to lead the program (called hereafter the “manager”). The manager will be responsible for overseeing the search process for workshop trainers, arranging for the training of the trainers, and conducting the multiple-stage evaluation process for the program (more on that later).

### **Trainers for the Workshops**

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Trainers will conduct the training sessions with participants. A key part in being a trainer is the ability to tell stories about the job search and recruiting process, and people with an HR background are best qualified to tell those anecdotes. *While it is not necessary that all volunteers have HR experience or training people in job search skills, it is required that one of the trainers in each workshop has an HR background.*

Look up all people in your local area who have human resources (HR) backgrounds (try looking at the state associations of HR professionals) and send a letter asking for their help with your program. Since your volunteers are local, they will be more flexible in the scheduling process than volunteers from other towns.

You will need to conduct CORI checks on your volunteers; however, as COAs, you will not be charged for this required precaution.

Trainers may choose to give their personal contact information to the participants and offer to continue coaching them post-training with their difficulties. Trainers may be interested in hosting a Job Seeker Support Group at your site (on a weekly, biweekly or monthly schedule, for example) as a means of providing ongoing support to the workshop participants and other adults in your community.

## **Trainer the Trainer**

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When people with HR backgrounds respond to your recruitment letter and volunteer to become trainers, have a meeting with the full group of volunteers. Three activities will occur at this meeting:

1. Screening. As required by law, you will need to CORI your volunteers. As will be discussed later, each class will be led by a pair of trainers, so any potential deficiencies present in a particular trainer probably will be checked by the other trainer. Therefore, there should not be a need to critically evaluate each trainer's abilities. Thus, the only two requirements to be a trainer or a coach are: 1. An HR background. 2. A CORI background check. Again, while it is not necessary that all volunteers have HR experience or training people in job search skills, *it is required that one of the trainers in each workshop have an HR background.*
2. Scheduling and Pairing Up. Have each trainer identify the potential days and hours each week that they could devote to conducting a class. In addition, ask for which four-week block(s) of the year they would prefer to volunteer for you. After you compile the preferences, then pair up volunteers based primarily on scheduling compatibility. Have the pairs exchange mutual contact information.
3. Giving Information to the Volunteers about the Train the Trainer Session. Tell the trainers the details about the train-the-trainer session. They should expect to spend a full day at the training, typically scheduled on a Friday or Saturday (dates and locations to be arranged by Elder Affairs.) Sites will be asked to pay the training site host for their volunteers' lunch at the train the trainer event.

## **Finding Your Participants**

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Who are your participants? The minimum age requirement for your participants can vary on based on your preferences, influenced by your human and financial resources as well as by the demand for your program. The Marblehead program markets officially to the 55+ population, but allows 50+ people to join as well. (In contrast, the town of Brookline sets its minimum age requirement at 60 years old.)

Inform the residents of your town via myriad outreach avenues about your training program, and extend a special invitation to potential participants in the community who have not yet visited your COA. Once you bring them in for the program, they may be inclined to become regular members of your COA.

It has been observed that smaller class sizes tend to create a more effective training environment. Therefore, it is preferable to have each class have ten people or less so that the trainers will quickly get to know their trainees and become familiar with their individual circumstances. It seems reasonable to register twelve participants and expect a

few to drop out of the program. A class of fifteen or more participants would be too large for the formation of strong trainer-participant connections.

On that note, it is important to emphasize that attendance should be mandatory for all of your program's four sessions. If a participant only attends one or two sessions, then the program's spirit and effectiveness are undermined. Thus, there should be a brief screening process for participants, probably consisting of a telephone or in person conversation. Here is a hypothetical situation. A participant asks, "Is it okay if I only go for the third session?" You should respond, "No, it is a package deal." It is important that someone not attend just the third session since by session three, the rest of the group would have hopefully attained a certain degree of mutual trust and rapport, and adding a new person to the group at such a late stage could disrupt that chemistry. Without that chemistry, the curriculum's crucial small group work may be rendered ineffective.

Should sessions be free? No, we recommend you charge a small, upfront, one-time fee of about \$5-\$15. By paying the "materials fee", people will feel invested in the program and will be more likely to attend all the sessions.

### **Class Structure, Homework, Evaluations and Scheduling**

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We recommend having four, two-hour, weekly sessions held on consecutive weeks. An alternative, having sessions every other week, hinders the incorporation of the class into the participants' and trainers' regular schedules.

If possible, have participants in advance send your trainers their résumés, if they already have résumés, to give the trainers a preliminary sense of the group's collective level of job search skills.

Open your sessions by stressing the importance of confidentiality regarding what occurs during sessions. Make sure your sessions are a safe environment for all participants so they eventually feel comfortable sharing experiences and vulnerabilities. Over time, members will develop a rapport with one another.

Going into the first session, the participants are not necessarily expected to have completed any preparation (other than handing in any existing résumés). During each session, participants may fill out certain forms together. Along with the curriculum literature handed out during the session, trainers should also provide their participants with the homework assignments due for each upcoming session. Homework may consist of researching critical personal information for filling out applications or may require the participant to draft several different types of résumés and cover letters. During the next session, the homework will be vital to the session's training and small group work.

At the end of the fourth session, ask the participants to fill out an evaluation regarding how that day's session went and its utility for the participant.

Classes should consist of group and small group exercises.

Do not give participants all the literature at once. At each session, provide participants the relevant handouts for the current session and the relevant homework assignment for the next session. Otherwise, people can get overwhelmed and/or may not attend again.

First conduct an initial program. Afterwards, you will be able to learn from those experiences before you create multiple, concurrent classes.

After you have completed your first program, consider offering people a choice to enroll in either a day class or in a night class, thus being able to capture people who are busy during the day as well as those who do not like the idea of night class.

### **Post Training Evaluation and Debriefing**

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At the close of the fourth and final session of each program, have all of your participants complete a *Program Evaluation Form* (attached). The survey asks the participants about what they hoped to gain from the training, whether or not it helped them gain skills and confidence in this area, how the workshop methods may be improved, and whether or not they would recommend the program to others. With the information from the survey, you will be able to determine what parts of your program may require reworking.

One week after the close of each 4-session program, send copies of the evaluation forms to Mary Kay Browne at [mary.k.browne@state.ma.us](mailto:mary.k.browne@state.ma.us). At the same time, send via email to [Mary.K.Browne@state.ma.us](mailto:Mary.K.Browne@state.ma.us) a list of the email addresses for all the program participants.

After a class is completed, the site manager should also conduct a debriefing with the trainers to go over their experiences. Furthermore, it would be advisable to have the next pair of trainers attend the debriefing so that they may benefit from the previous trainers' wisdom and experiences.

Exactly six months after each Workshop Series, Elder Affairs' survey coordinator will email a letter asking each training participant to complete an on-line survey. Included within the letter will be the link to the web site where Elder Affairs has posted an electronic survey. Elder Affairs will report back to each site the responses for your town as well as for the entire state.

## **Costs and Revenue for the COA**

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- Binders for curriculum handouts
- Dividers for the binders
- Paper for handouts
- Postage for surveys
- Paper for in-class survey at close of final session.
- A gift (e.g. a mug) for each of your trainers upon the graduation of their class.
- An easel with flip-charts for your training program sessions
- Name “tents” on cardstock for participants to write their names during sessions
- Advertisements
  - Targeting Participants - Public Services Announcements and fliers.
  - Targeting Trainers and Coaches.
    - Paper, envelopes, and postage for sending out letters to people with HR backgrounds in your town.

### Items Not To Pay For:

- You do not necessarily need to provide food at your training sessions.

### Optional Costs:

- Could provide some help with transportation of graduates to the training or to a job site, if they are unable to reach either location on their own.

### Funding Source:

- \$5-10 per person upfront materials fee

## Curriculum

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### 1. Looking Back... What's Next?

- Understand your motivating factors
- Assess your skills, interests, and values
- Identify your goals and needs

### 2. Getting Started!

- Develop your message
- Build your résumé
- Create a strong summary statement
- Draft an effective cover letter

### 3. Job Search Strategies

- Networking as the most effective method
- Post your résumé on the internet
- Answer classified advertisements
- Work with recruiters

### 4. Interviewing

- Prepare for the interview
- Understand how to sell yourself
- Practice answering questions
- Negotiate with confidence

### 5. Technology Portal

- On-line job sites on the internet
- Company research web sites

### For More Information:

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Contact Pat Roberts, Director, Marblehead COA, at (781) 631-6737 or Mary Kay Browne, Senior Project Director, Executive Office of Elder Affairs, at 617-222-7435.

**Sample PR – Use Local Agency Letterhead**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Name  
Telephone

DATE:

**WISDOM WORKS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM FOCUSES  
ON ASSISTING OLDER JOB SEEKERS**

*Your Town, MA:* Responding to the needs and concerns of the community's senior citizens is the mission of the Billerica Council on Aging (COA). Even before the current economic turmoil, the COA saw signs that seniors will need to work longer, retire later and require more financial resources to fund additional retirement years due to increases in longevity.

To meet this need, the COA will offer a program called Wisdom Works. Job seekers age 55 or older, who are or will be looking for work, can participate in this program. The series of four employment workshops will be facilitated by Human Resources professionals from a variety of companies including, \_\_\_\_\_ . These professionals have volunteered their time and expertise to facilitate the workshops developed by Keystone Associates, a premier outplacement firm in Burlington.

The four week workshops will begin Wednesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> . and end Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>. Topics include "Looking Back...What's Next" (skills assessment); "Getting Started" (resume/cover letter); "Job Search Strategies"; "Interviewing" and "Research & Technology" (learning how to navigate the internet).

Each session will be held at the ( insert location) . There is a registration fee of \$15.00 per person. The COA is planning to offer daytime and evening workshops. Participants must attend all four sessions.

If you are interested in joining the program or want more information please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ telephone.

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The Billerica Council on Aging is conveniently located at the Senior Center across from the Billerica green at 25 Concord Road. For more information about programs and services please call or look for the COA's monthly newsletter *The Outlook* available at town hall, library and other town locations as well as by subscription.

## Sample Letter – Use Agency Letterhead

Dear Fellow Townspeople and Human Resource Professionals,

We need your help!

As we all know, the present economic crisis has created enormous pain for many of our citizens, including older adults. Many are suffering from significant reductions in their retirement funds and beginning to realize the need to return to work. For most, the process is viewed as daunting...”Where do I begin?”...”What can I do?”...”What are my skills?”...”How do I write a resume?”...on and on the questions flow.

In recognition of this new need, I am collaborating with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Keystone Associates to offer a job search skills training program to help our seniors.

Now here is where you can help! We need trainers to conduct workshops and we need mentors to work one on one with individual job seekers who will have lots of questions and will need lots of coaching. Both roles require your time and commitment. If you are selected to become a trainer, it will require you to participate in a six hour training session, probably on a Friday or Saturday. Then you will be asked to lead four separate workshops, two or more times in 2011 and 2012. If you assume the role of mentor, you will participate in some training and you will be assigned three to four job seekers to provide individual counseling. In either role, we think this will be meaningful volunteer work for you to develop your own “job hunting” skills and assist older adults.

If you are interested, and we hope you are, or have questions, email me at \_\_\_\_\_ . If you know of other individuals in town who would be appropriate for these roles, please let us know. Or if this is an activity that you might want to “job share”, that might also work.

Whatever you decide, thank you in advance for your consideration.

Regards,

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COA Director

## **Program Evaluation**

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### *At Close of Final Workshop Session*

1. Announce the need for each participant to complete the Evaluation Form (attached) at the close of the final workshop session to aid in measuring and improving the program.
  - a. During the announcement, please inform all workshop participants that in 6 months time a web link to a follow-up survey will be sent to them via email to find out whether or not the new skills they learned in the workshop helped make a difference.
  - b. Give respondents at least 10 minutes to complete the evaluation form.
2. Make and mail copies of completed surveys to: Mary K. Browne, JD, Wisdom Works Project Director, Executive Office Elder Affairs, One Ashburton Place, 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Boston, MA 02108.
3. Send an email to [Mary.K.Browne@state.ma.us](mailto:Mary.K.Browne@state.ma.us) with a list of the email addresses for all the program participants.

### *6 Months After Final Workshop Session*

- ◇ The Survey Coordinator of Elder Affairs will send out an email to the workshop participants 6 months after the month in which they finished the training. The web based survey tool permits one response per person.
- ◇ Elder Affairs can break out survey results by town and share with sites..

**WISDOM WORKS JOB SEARCH SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM**  
**PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK**

**Session Dates:**

**Workshop Leaders:**

1. What did you want to gain by participating in the Wisdom Works Job Search Skills Training Program?

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2. Please rate the sessions you attended, using a five-point scale, where 5 means you agree completely and 1 means you disagree completely:

Agree

Disagree

	5	4	3	2	1
Before the sessions, I was very knowledgeable on this topic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The content was easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The content was useful to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The workbook was useful to me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I got what I needed from the program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel more confident about searching for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will use what I learned when I look for a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It would be worth a \$10 registration fee to participate in this program	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. What would have made the content of the sessions more useful to you?

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4. Have you used any of the services offered at your regional One Stop Career Center yet? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

5. Please rate the session leader(s), using a five-point scale, where 5 means you agree completely and 1 means you disagree completely:

Agree

Disagree

	5	4	3	2	1
The leader was knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The leader communicated well, so that I could understand the information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The leader answered questions to my satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The leader encouraged everyone to participate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The leader made me feel comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What group leadership methods could the leaders have used to make the program more useful to you or others?

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7. What was the most valuable lesson you learned about job searching?

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8. How do you plan to use the skills you gained in the sessions? What are your next action steps?

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9. Would you recommend this program to others?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

Please tell us why:

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**Thank you for your feedback!**