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The Workforce Investment Act of 1998: Implementation in the state of NSvada

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**THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT
OF 1998:
IMPLEMENTATION IN THE STATE OF
NEVADA**

PREPARED BY

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MARCH 20, 2001

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ABSTRACT

The topic of this professional paper is the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act in the State of Nevada. I have prepared this paper for the Department of Public Administration in partial fulfillment of a Masters of Public Administration degree. The paper focuses on information gathered through interviews with various stakeholders including those providing services, those needing service and those who designed the plan for the State of Nevada. The data presented supports that the initial implementation was successful, however further study and analysis are required to determine long term effects. At the conclusion, suggestions to increase the effectiveness of the State plan are presented, which could lead to the long term benefits of the process.

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CHAPTER ONE

I. INTRODUCTION

A. FACING THE CHALLENGE OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was a law enacted in response to the failing Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). JTPA most often focused on a specific program or “at risk” populations. However, with the world economy changing, the United States had to determine how to compete in a world with ever changing and improving technology. To do so, they needed to ensure that as many individuals as possible were trained or retrained to enter new and more specialized careers (Strumpf, p.5). The WIA was designed to accomplish this by combining the educational providers in a community and the government service programs into essentially “One stop shopping,” to ensure easier use for all clients.

On August 8, 1998 President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act. This Act was designed to improve the job training system through consolidation, better delivery systems and targeting of resources (Organizing, Workforce Investment Act).

The Act itself consolidated over 60 federal programs into block grants and gave each state governor the responsibility of administering the creation of a Workforce Investment Board within their own state.

While this was a federally mandated program, it also made good sense for the State of Nevada. The Las Vegas area, as one of the Nations fastest growing communities, had an increasing need for qualified individuals to fill the many jobs that existed or were becoming available.

The State of Nevada Governor, (Governor Miller at the time) appointed a committee that was chaired by Mr. Arthur Nathan. Mr. Nathan's committee created a plan for how the State of Nevada was going to meet and properly implement the requirements of WIA. After much deliberation and effort, the proposed plan was submitted to the Governor on March 22, 2000.

B. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study will be to evaluate the State of Nevada's implementation plan for the Workforce Investment Act. The research conducted will examine the effects of the Workforce Investment Act on the State of Nevada by interviewing members of the Workforce Investment Board to determine if the State has seen

improvement since the institution of the new Act. The aim of this paper is to discover if evidence exists that supports the assumption; through implementation of the plan, that effectiveness of the programs will increase.

This study will be executed in an effort to identify the outcome/impact of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 on the State of Nevada's job training system. Specifically, whether this act improved opportunities for those needing placement and provided better candidates for those seeking qualified employees, by improving the process used to prepare the individuals for job placement. Ultimately, I would like to discover whether; *Implementation of the Workforce Investment Act in the State of Nevada has been successful.*

C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Currently the State of Nevada, especially Clark County, Nevada, is experiencing a very high growth rate. Therefore, it is important that the State do everything possible to ensure that those moving into the valley are able to obtain and retain employment. If those moving into the state are unable to secure employment, other state services may be stretched beyond capacity. Services like ESD, Welfare, and living shelters.

However, with proper implementation of the WIA, programs designed to assist in training and procurement of employment for individuals will become more effective and help reduce the impact on other state agencies. This also helps to reduce the amount of taxes required to keep all the systems functioning. The more individuals employed, paying taxes into the system, versus taking from the system is always a positive.

CHAPTER TWO

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. THE NATIONAL ISSUE OF WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

“The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 [the “Act”] represents the first major reform of the nation’s job training system in over 15 years” (White Paper-Implementing 1998). Congress passed the Act in response to the criticism that federal job training and placement programs were antiquated and redundant....” (Congressional Quarterly, 1998). Those specific programs had taken shape over the past six decades in response to particular issues at the time. However, this *reactive* approach created a job training system that was in a state of disarray. The effects of this disorder included limited choices, lack of quality information, weak strategies and absences of strong accountability (White Paper - Implementing 1998). The Act (WIA) is an attempt to revitalize that system.

The Act provides the framework for a unique national workforce preparation and employment system, designed to meet both the needs of the nation’s businesses, and the needs of job seekers and those who want to further their careers (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1998). The

Conference Report from the House Of Representatives (July 29, 1998)

explains that:

“The purpose of this subtitle is to provide workforce investment activities, through statewide and local workforce investment systems, that increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants, and, as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation.”

However, such a goal will not be easily attained. The purpose of this Act is to restructure a system that has been piecemealed for decades. Moreover, for the new system to be successful, states and localities will need to make a strong commitment to the new system.

Along with the Act, the federal government has passed a law that is designed to supplant “outdated rules and regulations, [so] States and localities can move forward, transforming the current patchwork of programs into a comprehensive system, a comprehensive system which will better serve individuals who voluntarily seek assistance” (s. 1186,1998). The desired result is a more efficient and effective system. To that end, the Act “consolidates over 60 federal programs” (H.R. 1385, 1998). The consolidation brings those 60 federal programs into state administered block grants. The goal of the consolidation is to

allow individuals the freedom to make their own choices in regards to occupations, services and service providers. In addition, employers are able to recruit, hire and retain qualified employees.

The block grants will be distributed by the states through a voucher system (Congressional Quarterly, 1998). The voucher system will allow individuals to use the vouchers at the provider of their choice. In other words, users can choose to receive training and education in areas of individual interest rather than those dictated by government programs. Theoretically, this will produce individuals who are educated in their particular area of interest, increasing the odds that they will be hired by and remain with an organization. Furthermore, this shift to the voucher system forces service providers to ensure that their programs are of high quality since individuals are not mandated to a specific provider. Individuals will be able to select the provider they believe is able to best meet their needs, leaving disfavored providers with a smaller customer base.

One area where prior law was inadequate was accountability. Therefore, the Act set standards to measure the success of the programs. Four indicators were established: placement, retention, earnings and skills attained. This is a very important aspect of the Act. These measures are to be monitored by the Secretary of Labor, and the federal incentive funds will be tied to the level of performance attained

by the states. By tying funding to performance, states will have no choice but to ensure that providers are meeting and maintaining the required standards. The Act requires providers to maintain records relating to the outcome of individuals who use their services, and to publicly report those outcomes annually. Failure to maintain such records could result in the loss of their provider status.

The Act also looks at the service delivery area. Under the Job Training Partnership Act and the Wagner-Peyser Fund, there is no requirement that services be provided in a one-stop system. However, the Act requires that all core services be available at one location, with other locations working as supplements. Operators of the one-stop facilities will be determined through a competitive process and will ultimately be selected by the local board.

The Act is targeted towards three types of groups. These “target populations” set by the Act are adults, youths and dislocated workers. Adults are considered to be anyone over 18 years of age. However, priority will be given to those on public assistance and/or with low incomes. Youths are individuals between the ages of 14 and 21, having low income and meeting one of the barriers to employment. Additionally, at least thirty percent (30%) of the funds must be invested on out-of-school youth. Finally, the dislocated worker

population now includes displaced homemakers, but excludes the long-term unemployed, as had the prior law (etr/sideby.leg).

Congress designed the Act around certain principles in order to achieve the goals of the legislation. The principles include streamlined services, empowered individuals, universal access, increased accountability, strong role for local boards and the private sector, state and local flexibility, and improved youth programs. By creating systems around these principles, the goal was to increase employment, retention, and earnings of participants and increase occupational skills attainment by participants. In addition, by achieving these goals, the system will also improve the quality of the workforce, enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the Nation, and reduce welfare dependency (White Paper - Implementing 1998).

B. STATE OF NEVADA IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT.

Once the national law was enacted the next step was for states to develop plans to implement the act in their states. Nevada put together a unified plan that was submitted to Governor Kenny Guinn on March 22, 2000. The plan purposed the following goal:

“Make the Workforce Investment System the first choice for all employers and job seekers in Nevada.” (see Appendix 3)

The plan addressed that Nevada has a growing economy much like that of the nation as a whole. Therefore, the State needed to ensure that employees are well educated and have a broad base of skills. This was what employers already located in the state were looking for, as well as those employers assessing the desirability of locating their businesses in Nevada. This meant “Nevada’s Workforce Investment system needed to help workers move out of low-wage, low-skill jobs by providing access to education and training in order to advance.” “...the implementation of Nevada’s Workforce Investment Plan will be guided by a strong commitment to serving the needs of Nevada’s employers, large and small.” (see Appendix 2)

Additionally, the unprecedented growth that the state has been experiencing also created unprecedented need for training of job seekers. Nevada has for a long time been a service industry state, but as the economy continues to be as strong as it is currently, potentially, new more diverse employers will move into the valley. This creates a need for a more diverse group of workers.

The Governor appointed 35 members to the Workforce Investment Board to create an implementation plan for the Act. These individuals represented business, industry, labor, private citizens, community organizations, local elected officials, and government agencies. These

members chaired committees that were designed to develop different components of the plan. The committees worked separately and then later came together for finalization of the state plan.

Additionally, the state held public forums that allowed input from small and large business as well as anyone else interested. Allowing this process to be accessible to everyone with an interest in the workforce investment program ensured that the final plan represented the combined interest of all participants.

The “One-Stop” service centers including Internet sights was targeted to be operational by July 1, 2000. This computer accessible aspect of the program ensured the least amount of overlap of services.

The state plan was designed so that it can be monitored by professionals to ensure that the programs’ design, performance, customer satisfaction and federal compliance are being met. By doing this the state will be able to review both quantitative and qualitative information to access the success of the plan.

C. STATE AND NATIONAL STATISTICS

I was unable to locate any other State or National Statistics on how WIA is performing. Due to the fact this is newly enacted legislation and the fact that Nevada is one of the first states to actually implement, enough time has not elapsed to get any accurate figures nor have any

studies completed. The state plan addresses the fact that the reporting will be done quarterly and since the implementation just took place in November of 2000 statistical data is not yet available. (see appendix 4)

In addition to the short period of time, the federal regulation requires that reporting be done annually. As one year has not yet been completed there has not yet been any requirement for any of the currently participating states to provide such data.

CHAPTER 3

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods focused on interviews with Vicki Ham a State Workforce Investment Board Member, Mr. Ron Fletcher and Mr. Hal Bingham from the State of Nevada Employment Security Department, Mr. Robert Brewer the Chairman of the Local Workforce Investment Board and Ms. Anna Newhouse Employment Manager for the Stratosphere Corporation. These five interviews provided information conceivably from all sides of the program, those creating it, operating it and utilizing the program. The interviews consisted of personal interviews, which I conducted, that contained 17 pre-planned questions as well as unsolicited input from the participants. (See appendix A)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

To evaluate/determine how successful WIA has been, specific-focused interviews will be conducted. Interviews will be held with those individuals who helped put the program together as well as those who are currently operating and patronizing the system. The questions asked will be used to analyze the implementation process and the overall effects on the Nevada job training system. For the

purpose of this paper the definition of effectiveness will be the ability of the One-Stop centers to be functional.

The first interviews were with Ms. Vicki Ham of the WIA Board. Ms. Ham was appointed to the State board by Governor Miller and brings with her many years of experience including her work with the welfare to work program, being a member of the Private Industry Council. Mr. Brewer serves as the chairman for the Local WIA board and also brings many years of expertise. In addition to his responsibilities on the local board, he is also employed by Southwest Gas Corporation.

The focus of these interviews was to assess if the implementation process went as planned and if the outcome of the implementation is what the Local and State WIA Boards expected. If the implementation did not meet expectations, what corrective steps has the board taken to achieve their goals?

The next part of the interview process was to meet with two representatives from the State of Nevada, Employment Security Department (ESD). The interviews will aim to answer whether or not the implementation process purposed by the WIA Board accomplished what it stated it would. If so what improvements have been seen by the ESD and if not where did the board fail?

The final interview was with Ms. Anna Newhouse who is the Employment Manager for the Stratosphere Corporation. Her utilization of the system through recruitment of participants will lend a perspective of the private sector on the successfulness of the program.

CHAPTER 4

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The following is a discussion and presentation of the information that was obtained through interviews. Five interviews were administered, the first two with individuals from the Employment Security Department, Mr. Ron Fletcher the Director of Field Services and Mr. Hal Bingham a Claimant Employment Specialist. The second one with Mr. Robert Brewer of Southwest Gas, who is the chairman for the Local WIA board as well as being a member of the State and National Boards. Ms. Vicki Ham is a State WIA broad appointee and prior to WIA had been very involved with the Job Training Partnership Act and the local Private Industry Council. The final Interview was with Ms. Anna Newhouse Employment Manager for Stratosphere Corporation. All of these individuals were very involved in the implementation process of WIA.

A. AWARENESS OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

One area of concern that Ms. Ham brought to the table was the lack of awareness and education for private industry. She felt that one of the reasons that prior programs had been less than successful was due to the fact that many employers had limited or no knowledge of the programs and how to use them. So Ms. Ham

believed that it was important for her to participate in the sub-committee that was charged with creating a marketing campaign to create awareness within private industry. The campaign has been developed and the half million-dollar program will begin soon.

B. ENDING “TURF” ISSUES

All of them agreed that the biggest challenge that WIA faced during the implementation stage was putting all of the agencies together and having them function cooperatively. There were concerns expressed that the normal “Turf” disputes would continue and become a stumbling block for the plan. These “turf” wars need to be worked out as quickly as possible to ensure the success of the program as well as the success of the individual agencies. Mr. Brewer pointed out that while the federal guidelines were quite clear one area that had not been addressed was the prior funding sources. This played a big part in the “turf” issues.

Ms. Ham felt that one way to help reduce this struggle was to ensure that private industry was aware of how useful this program could be to employers. Not only could the program provide qualified workers, but would also contribute money toward their wages. Once employers understand the benefits, they will begin to increase their use of the system and the program will

become busier. This increase in business will provide a sense of security to the agencies by providing more than enough clients for all of them, therefore less “turf” wars.

C. BLENDING AGENCY CULTURES

Another area of concern was the blending of different agency's cultures. Each agency has a history of how it conducts business and now they would have to share one system. This in essence was why the act was created, but it caused a hurdle that the group of agencies had to deal with. Mr. Fletcher indicated that this blending required a lot of work and cooperation, but went fairly smooth when the implementation and opening of the one-stop center took place. The end result was that they were all trying to service the same customer and the blended system was easier for the client to use.

However, each agency still harbored worries that this one-stop center might reduce the importance of the individual agency or may cause a reduction in funds to the agency. Mr. Brewer indicated that the new system did not free up the agencies from their prior obligations, which only increased the agencies desire to ensure they did not have a reduction in funding. How this affects the new program will depend on the long-term relationships

between the agencies. Mr. Bingham felt that for now things seem to be working very smoothly, but that the nervousness is still present. However, with the survival of all participants through implementation process a limited sense of security has come to the individual providers.

D. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ONE-STOP CENTER

All five of those interviewed agreed that the one-stop centers are making it easier for the consumers. Most of the clients seem surprised to find out how much they can accomplish in one location. It is helping to resolve conflicts between agencies much more quickly. In the past a client may have to go back and forth between agencies to work out program problems. Now with everyone in one building resolution time is decreased.

This set-up is also decreasing the duplication of services. For example if a client is seeking a job that requires computer skills that he may be able to attain through more than one agency, it can quickly be seen by all agencies that the client has completed the computer class. Since this information is then maintained in a mutual computer system, It can be assured that more than one agency will not provide the same service. This also means that the client does not have to have his/her personal information input

each time they access services through a different agency. The clients seem happily surprised when they find out how much they can actually accomplish and how easy it is to utilize the services.

This ability to reduce the duplication of services not only benefits the clients trying to utilize services it also reduces the number of people required to provide the service which ultimately lowers the cost of labor. The programs become more efficient and cost effective.

The one-stop centers have held job fairs to help increase the awareness of the center and its programs for both the employers and job seeker. The fairs take time to teach the employers how and why the programs are a benefit to them and assist the job seeker in how to use the center to be most effective in securing employment. Mr. Fletcher indicated that these job fairs have been very successful. It was felt that this was another way to increase the business, therefore helping to ensure the survival of all agencies that participate in the one-stop programs.

From a one-stop participant's point of view Mr. Fletcher felt that the centers had forced the different agencies to work together and he feels that this has helped to open up the lines of communications between agencies. Mr. Fletcher stated that

agencies have had to join together to assist individuals. This has increased the speed in which individuals are placed in jobs.

From a private industry point of view Ms. Newhouse felt that while the one-stops were a benefit to job seekers by providing most services in one location, it did not solve problems that private industry had encountered in prior programs. She indicated that one of the biggest problems with hiring individuals out of these programs was retention. She stated that out of an average of 50 individuals referred from these program there were usually only one or two candidates that meet the minimum qualifications being sought. Of the one or two actually hired they were experiencing about a 50% turnover rate. The turnover was a majority of times caused by a lack of desire to actually obtain and retain employment by the job seeker and other times due to a lack of skills. Ms. Newhouse felt that WIA had not addressed or corrected these issues.

E. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

Both Mr. Fletcher and Mr. Bingham felt that the effect of the implementation of WIA on the employment security division was positive. They agreed that WIA has helped ESD to provide better service to the user as well as causing the agency to be more

efficient. However, Mr. Fletcher felt it was too early to say that things were great and that WIA was the end all solution. But he said that WIA has forced the agencies including ESD to recognize the problems associated with "Turf" wars and that "We can do more as a group then we can alone." WIA has increased the benchmark for agencies and that can only improve the effectiveness and quality of work provided by all agencies. The higher the expectations of the program become, the more improvement that will be recognized in the entire system. That progress will continue as those expectations are met and then exceeded. However, "all agencies will have to have a high level of commitment" Mr. Brewer stated for this to occur.

The difference that both Ms. Ham and Mr. Fletcher pointed out with WIA from prior legislation is that WIA required the agencies to work as a group. Mr. Brewer agreed and said, "This is the first time we have seen legislation that dictated this type of delivery system". In order for these agencies to receive funding they have to cooperate and work together. For example in the past there were 115 agencies receiving funding for training purposes. Of these 115, Mr. Fletcher said he could name approximately eight. If he, as a member of the system, was unfamiliar with these providers, how would a job seeker be able to access them? Now

under WIA there are only three training providers. This allows for employers and job seekers to easily locate and access these programs even if they do not use the one-stop centers. Also this allow for better reporting of how the funds are being utilized.

Additionally, the agencies that are participating in the one-stop centers are all being placed on a one-stop operating system. This means that if an individual goes directly to an agency for assistance they will be able to access all the programs and information available at the one-stop center. This will again help to speed up the process for the job seeker as well as reduce duplication of agency efforts. This saves the agency money as well as allowing them to identify individuals who are using the system to avoid being put back to work.

They all agreed that it is still unclear whether or not WIA will change the job training system in the state of Nevada. However they were optimistic in stating that Nevada was one of the first states to have their plan designed and implemented. They also felt that all the participating agencies were making a legitimate attempt to make the one-stop center work and relax their never-ending "turf" struggles.

CHAPTER FIVE

V. IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

The job training system, throughout the Nation, has gone through many revisions over the years. These revisions are, in my opinion, due to a desire to lower the number of unemployed individuals in the nation. Ultimately by reducing the number of unemployed and by helping these individuals to obtain gainful employment the cost to the government and the taxpayer is reduced.

While my paper analyzed the implementation of the new legislation, the implementation was so recent that it is difficult to accurately determine the success of the process. Due to the short implementation period no statistical research was available. There is an extensive amount of analysis that will need to be done in the future to determine the success of the program, as well as the areas that will need adjustments once statistical data is compiled.

One area to watch is the other states. Since each state sets up their own state plan for WIA and Nevada was one of the first states to implement their plan, Nevada may be able to learn how to improve their plan as additional states implement their programs. Another improvement to this research would be interview other agencies to assess their evaluation of the implementation process.

Future research may want to address three additional areas. The first area being unions and their potential to assist the One-Stop centers. The second to survey private industries as to their desired results from such legislation versus what the public sector thinks private industry wants. Finally, to interview One-Stop center clients. What do they want and need from the centers, are they receiving that and what improvements could be made.

The importance of evaluating and re-evaluating the plan is essential for the success of the program here in Nevada as well as the success of the plans Nationwide. This need to make adjustments will be even more important with the WIA program, than it has been with other state programs as this is one of the first times that the legislation has require the joint cooperation of multiple agencies.

Ron Fletcher commented, "WIA may not be the end all to the job training system's problems, like other programs in the past, however it has taken a huge step in requiring agencies to work together, it is very progressive from what has been done in the past." By reducing some the "turf" issues the programs may be able to function more efficiently in the future.

This progressive approach to rectifying the job training system's problems, while causing some uneasiness for agencies, has so far been a huge success. The one-stop centers are busy, the job seekers find the

programs easier and quicker to use, and employers are receiving applicants in a timely manner. However, the legislators need to still look at what they can do to increase the qualifications of the applicants and how to motivate those applicants to come off the welfare system and actually retain employment.

In conclusion, the State of Nevada has done an exceptional job in creating and implementing its WIA plan. There seems to be a very dedicated group of individuals that have participated in the implementation of this program. Individuals from the WIA Board, the Agencies, Private Industry, and the community have all cooperated to ensure that this program is a success and a model for the rest of the Nation. They have the opportunity to continue this successful position for the stakeholders by continuing to function in a cooperative manner and by not being afraid to make changes that will continue to improve the program.

Nevada's program could ultimately be the example for the rest of the Nation on how to design, implement and run the WIA program as it sets the example of how to operate successfully in an environment that in the past has been accustomed to "turf" disputes. Some suggestions on how the program may become more effective:

1. Create an on-line data base of job seekers that is accessible to employers, who can search the data base and then contact

the one-stop center to make arrangements to interview the candidate.

2. Continue to familiarize private industry with the program, how it works and the benefit to the employer.
3. Invite individuals from all agencies to make suggestions as to how the program could be improved. As their suggestions are heard and implemented they will begin to feel they hold a stake in the success of the program, the "turf" mentality will begin to diminish.
4. Create quality actions teams of individuals from the different agencies to meet monthly to discuss problems and the solutions. Again this should begin to help them move away from their own agency identity and feel part of the bigger team.
5. Work with private industry to increase the success rate of individuals coming out of the program.

The implementation of the suggestion above will help to increase the success of WIA by diminishing the "we versus them" mentality that the agencies are used to. Additionally, the suggestions will continue to increase the knowledge of the program by private industry and increase their ability to access and retain the individuals in the program.

APPENDIX 1

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Your Name:
2. Your Title:
3. Who is your employer?
4. Are you a member of the Workforce Investment Board?
5. What was your role in the implementation process of WIA?
6. What challenges have you encountered in trying to implement the state WIA plan?
7. Do you believe that the combined one-stop facilities will cause power struggles between agencies?
8. Do you or your agency believe that WIA and the one-stop center will be beneficial to those seeking employment?
9. Do you or your agency believe that the one-stop centers will be beneficial to employers seeking qualified applicants?
10. What impact do you think WIA will have on the State of Nevada?
11. What impact do you think WIA will have on your agencies or other agencies?
12. How has your agency responded to WIA?
13. What has been the cost, of implementing WIA, to your agency?

14. Has there been any benefits to your agency from the implementation of WIA?
15. What is required of your agency by WIA
16. Did the Implementation process go as planned? If no what would you have changed?
17. Has the implementation process in your opinion been successful?

APPENDIX 2

APENDIX 3

APPENDIX 4

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