

Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Operations Committee Minutes
October 11, 2023

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment

Not Present: Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Sara McLaughlin, Financial Manager; Patti Saarinen, EMDC Director of Workforce Services

Others Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant

Call to Order

Chair Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:36am.

Review and Approve Last Meeting Minutes

VOTED: To approve September 13, 2023, meeting minutes.

Motion: Grant Provost **Second:** Razell Ward **Vote:** All present in favor

Board Update

Erin gave an update on her continued outreach within the workforce community for interest in joining the Board in any of the open positions remaining. She is reaching out to three more businesses as she has had no response from anyone that she previously reached out to. She has been working with Jessica Cyr from KVCOG and is attending an upcoming meeting where she is going to ask if Jessica will join the board filling the role as the required economic development person needed. She is also reaching out to Simon Thorn who works for Consolidated Communications and has been working with Erin regarding broadband and possible work around WIOA. The final person she is reaching out to is Jen Hogan from Community Credit Union. Cathy stated that Erin is doing a great job at finding possible candidates and reaching out to people of interest. Erin explained why she is networking so much within the community to introduce herself and the organization and garner interest in an in-person and intimate way versus cold calling scenarios.

Open Discussion/New Business

Listening Session: Cathy discussed the listening session that she attended with Erin that focused on the strategic plan for workforce development and bringing more work into Maine. The current strategic plan is expiring, and they are looking to make changes so brainstorming in small groups around various topics around growing workforce took place. There were various organizations and she found it interesting to learn things like the existence of a career center at the University of Southern Maine. After the ideas are reviewed there will be more meetings and sessions to continue to work on the plan.

Erin explained that this all started back in 2019 when the Governor brought together people across Maine that included government officials, businesses, etc. to create a ten-year economic plan for Maine and now that the halfway point has arrived this session was to review where we stand on meeting expectations and goals and look at what changes need to be made moving forward. This plan had three goals that consisted of raising the pay rate in Maine, they wanted to attract 75,000 people into the

workforce from inside and outside of Maine, and the last goal was to look at the amount of money attached to the products that people make. The State also must do a WIOA plan that is coming due in March, so they are working with other organizations and entities that also have similar plans to see how cohesive work can be done around these areas.

Erin felt that her focus in this plan was to look at attracting workers to Maine, working on shortening the authorization to work in Maine to sooner than six months minimum. She explained that a lot of New Mainers who have been in Maine for that length of time and longer still don't have that authorization and this needs to be addressed.

Erin was surprised that there was not more participation from businesses at the event. Cathy asked how businesses would have known the event was happening to be able to attend. Erin stated that businesses would need to be part of the economic development districts that every state has, Maine has AVCOG and KVCOG which sent out invitations and notice of the event. Cathy feels that a lack of understanding of the existence of these boards and what they do keeps a lot of businesses from participating. She feels we should work at getting the word out about these boards, Erin stated that a questionnaire is going to go out soon that will ask these questions and create opportunities to get more awareness out there.

Razell mentioned that there is also a lack of communication and focus on language learning and support within the workforce around New Mainers and those coming into Maine who have language barriers. Erin recently had a discussion on credentials not being viable across state lines and other countries as well which adds to the workforce shortages in certain areas. Razell stated that a lot of employers set a minimum level of growth in the workplace which leads to entry level positions as a cut off for many job seekers due to a lack of education and proper training around language, education and skill set. She mentioned that she has reached out numerous times about these issues and has had no response to date. Erin mentioned the Office of New Americans that the Governor has put together, Razell already spoke with them at the Directors meeting last week and found it interesting that they are looking at what organizations can do to assist the ONA, but she wants to know what ONA can do to support these organizations. Cathy is interested in how other states with multi-language workers is handling this same situation. Razell said that this is an ongoing problem at not only a local and state level but a federal level and has been addressed for over ten years with no real solution in site.

RFA/App for CBO Awards:

A few weeks ago, a meeting was held to discuss distribution of the funds to those organizations that they were awarded to. One award was given to MEERS for Androscoggin County, two awards were given to Western Maine Community Action for Franklin and Oxford counties and another two awards were given to Maine RE-Entry Network for Somerset and Kennebec counties. Erin is currently in the process of putting together contracts and will reach out to the state because the monies are coming from both the QUEST contract and the ARPA contract, so she needs to confirm if two contracts need to be written for each or if one contract can contain both grants.

Policy Update

Four policies have been sent into the Maine Department of Labor that included the youth incentive policy, the additional requirement, the training policy, the individual training account policy in OTT and Erin is now waiting on responses. Some of these were already approved at the April meeting and did not pass approval so they were re-done and once Ginny reviews them and replies back Erin will update on those. She is looking to get approval of them during the end of the month Board meeting. The board will also need to approve the financial manual that was approved by MDOL and needs board approval as well. Work is continuing customized training and incumbent workers as well and updates will be given as they come in on those.

WIOA Monitoring MDOL and USDOL:

Every year monitoring of the service provider is done, and the state monitors us, Erin attended the monitoring of the service provider on September 25th at the Lewiston Career Center where the entire EMDC staff was present. She was very impressed with how that went considering the number of new staff that they have and the fact that everyone was prepared after receiving the questions on Friday and being at the monitoring meeting that Monday and she relayed that to Patti.

Carrie and Erin went through the monitoring of the board with both Ginny and her assistant Shannon last week. One of the things that came out of that session was the need to have other people besides Erin participate in meetings and such. Moving forward, there will be a standing conversation where the board members can bring up any concerns, questions and ideas that they have and raise participation with others besides Erin.

She mentioned the specialty electricians need that Josh brought to the table and the meeting that followed. Chris is working on sending out materials on current curriculum on Electric and Instrumentation created and being taught by Rick Reardon, once this material is sent another meeting will be scheduled with the participants (Hutamaki, Cianbro, Sappi and some educators within the college field). If something can be put in place to assist these four major companies with employee needs, it will be significant within the workforce across the board.

A monitoring of the One Stop Operator was also completed and there will be “dings” in that one for certain. EMDC is our One Stop Operator, and they are not providing that service for us or the Northeast. This is part of their contract, so when the monitoring report comes back Erin, Ginny and Galen will have a meeting with Lee and let him know what he needs to do within that part of the contract. The service provider in the coastal counties does not do this as they are not the One Stop Operator because they felt that as a required partner they could not be in that position over the other required partners and passed it out to USM.

Once the reports are returned Erin will reach out for conversation around them and how best to handle any “dings” and issues that arise at that time.

The USDOL is also monitoring us and the Northeast between December 11th and December 15th. Carrie and Erin have met and are working on gathering required documents and information that is due by the end of October, and they will be monitoring only our financials during this time. This area has not been

monitored by the USDOL in a while and so that increases the stress level around everything, but Erin is looking forward to it as a chance to do better. The need for establishing a Youth Committee is already being addressed and Erin will speak more about that during the upcoming board meeting. This committee needs to be chaired by a current board member, but non-board members can be part of the committee.

MOU/IFA:

Erin is currently working to extend the expiration for the current MOU and IFA. Extending the MOU should not be any problem, but the IFA will be a bit of a hassle. The IFA (Infrastructure Funding Agreement) is the agreement that had every region pick at least one comprehensive one stop site. That site in our region is the Lewiston Career Center. All fourteen required partners identified in WIOA that are in Maine and in our region must financially support this site. This has been a requirement with WIOA since 2014, however it was never adhered to until the USDOL stated it needed to be done a few years back. The IFA and MOU generally last for three years, but due to a lack of staff the current ones that were created in 2022 were done for only one year. The problem being dealt with is the monies that the non-residents of the career center must pay. Some of these people are charged across the state by multiple entities and what the varying fees being charged are. The other issue is that whoever signed off on all these signatures did not inform the bill payers of these charges and so this has created sticker shock. The \$5,000 dollars that Erin previously asked for was to assist with covering some of those expenses and lessen or even out the amounts being paid.

Erin will continue to meet with people and work through these and any other issues to get the MOU and IFA completed as soon as possible since we are currently without them or an extension agreement.

November Operations Mtg in Vegas

Erin will be away in November attending a Youth Symposium during the time the November Operations Committee meeting is scheduled. It is important that EMDC start to focus on youth within our region despite doing a good job and getting better. They finally spent all PY21 and are well into spending for PY22. They were also able to increase their numbers in their implementation schedule after not meeting them last year. It was decided to cancel that meeting and keep to the next scheduled meeting in December, Erin will let everyone know the decision.

ED Review:

Erin has been with CMMWDB for a year and a review of her performance is needed. Cathy asked if there is a form from previous reviews, but there is not one. Cathy will get review forms from another board she is on and get that out for review to see if it will work in this situation. Once the form is agreed on, Carrie will format it and send it out to everyone and then it will be added to the agenda of either an operation meeting or a board meeting to complete. Erin will look at the personnel policy and get that to everyone on how this needs to be handled and by whom.

Other Business:

Lewiston Adult Education called Erin regarding the DOE funds designated to the creation of an apprenticeship for teaching. Razell corrected that it was DOL money focused on education. Razell could not do this after receiving funds for adult education apprenticeships already. So, they contacted Erin

very late in the game despite Razell's guidance to reach out months before. It was submitted as a board and got it in on time. Bill Grant, Director of Operations for Lewiston Public Schools stated that he never thought to partner with the workforce board before this and now that door has been opened for future endeavors.

Erin sent in a letter of support for the Skowhegan Main Street for a re-compete grant for training that she can get out to anyone interested in reading it.

Adjourn

Chair Grant Provost adjourned the meeting at 9:20am.

Next meeting: Wednesday, December 13, 2023, 8:30am-9:30am via ZOOM

Next full board meeting: Thursday, October 26, 2023, 8:30am-10:30am at Maine Housing Authority

ED Outreach since last Operations Meeting

9/13/2023 hosted Specialty Electrician meeting with Timber HP, Sappi, Huhtamaki, Cianbro, Ironworkers Local 7, AGC, and Maine Community College System to discuss ways to meet the employment need in this area. An instructor from EMCC was invited but did not attend. He developed a short curriculum to train current electricians in this area. Chris said he would get the curriculum and share it with the attendees. As soon as that happens, we will have another meeting to see how we might move forward.

9/15/2023 attended the annual meeting for Coastal Counties Workforce Initiatives. This quarterly meeting is held in a hotel with breakfast and a series of awards. They handed out a very well-produced annual report, which I will share at the board meeting. It was well attended.

9/21/2023 gave a presentation to The Lighthouse Soup Kitchen board in Waterville regarding WIOA programs and how it might help their customers. Also discussed the possibility of their agency becoming a work experience site. They were not in favor of this as they are strictly volunteers. I offered to come back with an EMDC staff member to present to interested customers.

9/22/2023 attended a demo with EMDC staff regarding language interpretation technology. This is required for accessibility and is needed in the Lewiston Career Center. The equipment was impressive, and I will follow up with EMDC.

9/22/2023 met with committee to select awardees for the CBO RFA.

9/25/2023 attended MDOL monitoring for the service provider at the Lewiston Career Center.

9/26/2023 attended monthly regional care team meeting with the DOC and YLAT. Well attended by other providers like corrections people, VR, and social service agencies.

9/27/2023 attended the Maine Development Foundation's annual meeting. Very well attended and well run. Connected with several people who could be future collaborators.

9/27/2023 attended the Getting Ahead graduation. Met all of the graduates. Connected with someone whom I had talked to once before that now wants to learn more. Also connected with the executive

director for The Center for Wisdom's Women who serve women recently released from prison and those that experience domestic violence.

10/3/2023 Met with President Karen Normandin of Kennebec Valley Community College.

10/3/2023 Met with MDOL for monitoring of the board and One Stop Operator.

10/4/2023 attended the State Workforce Board and DECD's Listening Session in Lewiston. Cathy was there. Small crowd with very few businesses. One is scheduled for October 18 in Fairfield.

10/4/2023 Patti Saarinen and I met with the executive director of The Center for Wisdom's Women to talk about WIOA services for her customers. She was very excited to learn of these opportunities and will be working with EMDC in the future.

10/6/2023 met with BRS staff to discuss the IFA and the discrepancies in the last one.