

**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board  
Operations Committee Minutes  
April 10, 2024**

Approved by Operations  
Committee

June 12, 2024

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**Board Members Present:** Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member/Youth Committee Chair; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Chris Winstead, Treasurer/Chair of Resources

**Others Present:** Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant; Sara McLaughlin, Contracted Financial Advisor

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### **Call to Order**

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:34am.

The order of agenda items was changed due to time restraints that Grant had with a State House meeting he needed to attend within the same timeframe as the Operations meeting and his ability to vote on any agenda items that were discussed during the meeting.

It was also noted that due to the upcoming full CWMWDB Board meeting Patti would not be giving a Service Provider report at this time and would present her report to the full board during the April 25<sup>th</sup> meeting instead.

### **Review and Approval of the Last Meeting Minutes**

**Voted:** Approval of the March 13, 2024, meeting minutes.

**Motion:** Razell Ward

**Second:** Grant Provost

**Vote:** All present in favor

### **Updates**

#### ➤ **Marketing Campaign**

The marketing campaign proposals for Disconnected Youth garnered four responses in total. Erin evaluated these and sent them along with her evaluation to the campaign team for further discussion. The campaign team was comprised of Chris Winstead, Laurie Glidden (who was unable to attend the meeting), Angelina Klouthis-Jean, Erin, and Ben Hawkins. Everyone on the team read the proposals and, after a collaborative discussion, there were two proposals that were moved ahead as options for the campaign and two that were dismissed from the selection process. At this time everyone evaluated the two proposals that were on the table, from Fuseideas and BroadReach. Both proposals were well written and despite BroadReach being a Maine-based, female staffed company that has previous experience with the demographic and campaign needs, their budget was excessive and so they were not moved forward.

Fuseideas is not a Maine-based company, but they do have offices in Portland Maine and staff within the Portland area that will be assigned to assist with campaign needs. They also have experience with the demographic of the campaign and put together a very detailed and professional proposal that was

sent to everyone prior to the meeting for review. Fuseideas had a very clear budget that was detailed, and project driven. Ben did a deep dive into the budgets of both Fuseideas and BroadReach after some questions he had about their budgets. He shared his insights with the committee. After completion of the search, the committee felt Fuseideas was the best choice. Erin can send along any of the information and notes from the meeting and proposals to anyone who would like to review them, but the consensus is to move forward with Fuse Ideas.

Chris said that the process was handled well and that the review conversation was very helpful in making a final choice. He stated that the two agencies not chosen did not seem to put much effort into their proposals. They did not have the experience and understanding for the campaign that was being looked for. Chris stated that along with a much clearer budget Fuseideas is also providing more staff support, which takes away CWMWDB staff needing to pick up administrative pieces throughout the campaign.

Razell asked what the funding cap for the campaign is and Erin explained that it is \$90,000 which she posted on the CWMWDB website. All proposals needed to budget for that amount. Erin said Ben's review of the budgets helped in breaking down individual costs and showing the best financial options of each.

Erin stated that of the two proposals that were not chosen, one of them had done previous work with Angelina and they were not happy with those results, and they did not seem to put much effort into the proposal as if they expected to receive it based on previous work. The other company did not want to hold focus groups and had typos and errors within the proposal that made it look unprofessional. Razell stated that she also worked with Pulse previously and would not recommend working with them.

At this time a vote was held to agree on moving the proposal for using Fuseideas to the Board for final approval during the April 25<sup>th</sup> board meeting.

**Voted:** to approve moving the Fuseideas proposal to the full board for final approval.

**Motion:** Chris Winstead      **Second:** Razell Ward      **Vote:** All present in favor

➤ **ARPA Proposal 3**

Erin sent out the ARPA proposal and spoke with Angelina on Monday regarding the contract that will be written. More detailed information on Fit First is being requested and once that is reviewed everything should move forward with a focus on transportation funding through the partnership with Go Maine and usage of van transportation.

Chris asked if any thought into using Congressional Directed Spending to assist with funding needs for the proposal and partnership plans. He said that these opportunities have recently opened with a small window of accessibility. Chris explained that this CDS is an old earmark through a new application process that as an organization is available to us. He is not sure if the timeline would work with this project but feels that if there are specifics that would be beneficial to employers within the region in the future, this avenue may be worthwhile for assistance. Erin's concern is the timeframe of receiving the funds which she knows in the past has taken quite a bit of time.

Erin found information on the Northern Boarder Regional Commission's WORC grant due in June that may be an option for receiving funds between \$500,000+. The ARPA funds took away the virtual reality funding that she feels would be beneficial for youth to explore various pathways through a virtual career center and she would like to find funding that would put that back on the table. Chris stated that something like that could use the CDS funding as well for VR headsets, a mobile lab, training, etc. He expressed that requesting funding for "down the road" projects that do not have immediate budgeting needs would be good things to consider requesting CDS funds for in the future. Erin will inform everyone once she receives the contract.

➤ **NAWB Conference**

Erin and Laurie recently attended the NAWB conference. Erin's focus during the conference was around data that would inform the writing of the local strategic plan for 2025. She will give more details during the April 25<sup>th</sup> board meeting and begin the process with the board in July. She attended meetings that focused on labor market information, developing strategies, and the 17 required functions of a board from WIOA law. She will share this with the board during the April meeting to give more information to everyone on their role as a board per WIOA law. She attended sessions on skills-based economy and how employers can access skills and not education.

There was a session on the re-authorization of WIOA. The house sent out their proposal for WIOA re-authorization to the Senate which will likely not be approved as they are creating their own strategy. Erin does not feel that anything will happen during the election year. While at the conference, the FY24 funding package was signed into law and is level funding for us. PY 2024 and 2025 will need to conform to the debt ceiling budget caps. However, they are looking into a career training fund of \$8 billion over a 10-year period, which would be helpful considering flat funding. There was a lot of discussion around possibilities but that nothing will be settled until after the election of a new President.

They also stated that within the House bill, there is a workforce Pell grant that is available for anyone who fills out the FASFA, which was traditionally designated for higher education and not for short term trainings. The new bill would allow for those short-term trainings, such as CDL and CNA.

Erin will be able to take all the information from the various sessions and put them together into ways that assist with actionable strategies.

As chair for the youth committee, Laurie focused her sessions on youth. She spoke with some of the presenters on the most successful strategies they used to connect with youth in their regions. She said that one of the best responses was that someone connects with the parents of the youth in their area using social media.

She attended a session with an organization that uses Virtual Reality and has found it very successful and feels that looking more into using CDS funds for a VR project would be something to consider. She said the biggest take away is working with the funding that we have and working with partnering organizations to be successful and pool available resources.

Cathy asked Erin to send everyone the 17 Board requirements for review prior to the board meeting.

➤ **MOU/IFA**

Erin has been working on the extension for the MOU/IFA that expired in 2023. After many attempts, she got everyone to buy into the extension until 2025 for the MOU and 2024 for the IFA. She is currently working on scheduling a mandatory meeting with all the partners to agree on the comprehensive one stop center, which is the Lewiston Career Center, for payment.

A Doodle poll has been sent out to everyone to schedule a meeting in May, and once responses are returned the meeting will be scheduled. Razell asked about the Career Center payment being decreased due to the DMV utilizing space there. Erin has reached out to various people within at the Center and the state for an update and was told that this will not take place within this program year--maybe not by the end of the year either. She will update once more information is available. People will need to agree to the IFA as costs stand, and if anything changes, a prorate will be given for the overpayments.

➤ **USDOL Monitoring**

Erin shared the response that CWMWDB gave to Kim Moore from MDOL to be shared with the USDOL team regarding concerns within the monitoring report. The USDOL was monitoring the state, and we were part of that monitoring and responded to our part. The board will need to vote to approve the response submitted from CWMWDB.

The Monitoring report showed concern about noncompliance with competitive procurement policies, and the lack of end dates on contracts for services. Erin disagreed with their request to create a process to regularly conduct competitive procurement; there is a process in place in the financial manual. She proposed changing the language within the financial manual to ensure that contracts include an end of service date and that would outline extension and when the board would need to go out for procurement again. For example, as our service provider EMDC receives a contract for delivering WIOA services. That contract could be automatically extended for a period if the board was happy with their work. But at some point, the board should send out an RFP to meet the spirit of a competitive procurement. This would ensure that every so often CWMWDB would go out for competitive procurement for necessary work and, depending on the focus of that work, more time could be allowed for an extension of services.

Once approved by the board all contracts without end dates would need to be updated with an end date and the financial manual would need to be updated with the new language in place for contracted services.

The other area of concern was around the files that were assessed. When we monitor files, EMDC is given the participant ID number to evaluate and check that nothing was missed within the audit. When we received the file list from the USDOL, there were no participant ID numbers provided. Once the numbers were given, EMDC went into Maine Job Link and reviewed the cases. What was found was that many of the issues of "missing information" were actually in the file—just in areas that the monitoring team missed. A few concerns were regarding regulations that were misinterpreted by the monitoring team.

A recent meeting with EMDC staff within our area and the Northeast was held to review each case file and discuss the problems and what was needed to fix them and make correct notations moving forward. The response that included areas that were mistakenly noted by the monitoring team and the issues that we are fixing on our end was sent to Josh to be forwarded to the USDOL. Razell asked if this was a statewide concern or a regional concern. The monitoring was completed with Central Western and Northeastern boards only. Cathy asked if reviewing finances was random or specific, Erin said it may have been due to the high-risk status but was random.

### **Financial Update—Sara**

Sara gave a brief update regarding current administrative financials with the budget through March 2024. The Opioid grant ended on December 31<sup>st</sup> and was spent 100%. PY 22 is being watched closely as it ends June 24 and EMDC still has \$325,000 left to spend on that before it expires. Erin has been monitoring this and how much they have been requesting from the drawdowns. She looks at how much money each program is requesting, she feels that dislocated worker funds will be spent, but has concerns around both adult and youth spending. She sent two emails to EMDC leadership considering the current level of funding minus the expected level of drawdowns likely to be requested before the year's end. The remaining amount would need to be returned to the state. She requested EMDC come up with ways to utilize those funds. Erin has been working on gathering partners around youth. She has a meeting with Susan Cerini to discuss a plan of action. She also had a meeting with an organization that offers CDL-A training to incarcerated people prior to their release. Justice-involved people are very likely eligible for the QUEST grant. She will try a pilot within our region which would decrease both QUEST and adult spending. Chris asked if there would be enough funding for these two programs as he may be able to assist if there is any shortage of funds.

Sara pointed out that EMDC has tapped into PY23 WIOA as they spent their youth funds in PY22 WIOA, this can only be used for youth spending and not for things like staff salaries. Erin stated that EMDC is spending PY23 funds on in school youth, as they received a notice from the state that no more PY22 funds could be spent on in school youth to meet the balance required in WIOA of 75% funding spent on out of school youth and only 25% on in school youth. The board has spent 100% of the POY22 funds and is currently working on spending from the PY23 funds.

The Career grant ends in September 2024 and the remaining funds for CWMWDB will be spent on close out funds. Sara feels that EMDC will not have problems spending the rest of their funds within this grant before the expiration in September.

Sara feels that the QUEST grant will start picking up in spending despite the slow start since the Opioid funds have been depleted. Erin reminded everyone that despite the start date for QUEST being October 2022, the contract was not signed until late February 2023. Sara said the expiration date of September 30th is not a concern as there may be an extension for spending.

The ARPA grant was discussed a bit regarding the marketing campaign proposal and the RFP. The expenses will come from this funding so we will start to see a decrease in those expenses. Erin feels the ARPA will be extended from its current expiration date of December 31, 2024. There would be no

additional funds but more time to use the current funds. Sara said she budgets funds to ensure that we do not leave any money on the table. Extensions mean she needs to re-work the budget.

Reviewing the administrative expenses, 42% of the budget has been spent so far. Due to the ARPA and QUEST contracts doubling the budget, the numbers are skewed this year. Removing that anomaly, the budget is just under where it should be. There are no concerns showing despite the rise in travel costs. Budgeting will be starting soon with the PY22 WIOA funds being removed and the PY24 WIOA getting placed in the budget. Sara and Erin will meet between May and June to work through the new budget and get it to the Board for approval before the new fiscal year starts. Chris asked if the Board approved the audit and Sara explained that this is on the agenda for the next board meeting as it was just met with the deadline.

### **Board Membership Update**

Erin said that Billi Mitchell from Irving Woodlands has agreed to participate on the board. She will start attending the meeting in April, and Erin will forward the committee her resume for review. She is very engaged with the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and is very responsive and active.

### **Open Discussion/New Business**

The annual report filing due to the Secretary of State by June 30<sup>th</sup> and has already been completed and paid for by Erin.

The audits were also completed and there was one concern noted around the lack of financial monitoring. We are aware of the situation and are working on finding someone to handle this piece. Sara previously completed it, but it is a conflict of interest where she works with us and EMDC. She is assisting in finding someone to do it for us.

### **Adjourn**

Cathy Witherspoon adjourned the meeting at 9:33am.

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, May 8, 2024, 8:30am-9:30am via ZOOM

**Next full board meeting:** Thursday, April 25, 2024, 8:30am-10:30am via ZOOM