

Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board  
**Operations Committee Minutes**  
August 9, 2023

Approved by Operations  
Committee

September 13, 2023

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**Board Members Present:** Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Razell Ward, Secretary

**Not Present** Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment

**Others Present:** Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant; Sara McLaughlin, Financial Manager; Patti Saarinen, EMDC Director of Workforce Services

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**Call to Order**

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

**Review and Approve Last Meeting Minutes**

**VOTED:** To approve July 12, 2023 meeting minutes.

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

**Provider Update**

Patti gave an overview of current enrollment as listed:

<u>WIOA Title</u>	<u>Planned for 1<sup>st</sup> Qtr.</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Adult	87	58
Dis. Wkr.	42	30
Youth (In school)	20	14
Youth (Out of School)	70	47
CWO	158(12/23)	133
QUEST	75	27

She stated that it is typical that numbers slowdown a bit in July but with projects and schools starting in August, they will be seeing numbers increase. The state reports that of the 200+ Pixelle workers that were laid off, there are 60 that are still collecting unemployment and they will send another email reminding them of available services. Yellow Trucking in Fairfield and Westbrook closed, laying off 13 people in that area, Caire Home Health in Augusta closed affecting 12 workers and The Christmas Tree Shops will close on August 5<sup>th</sup>; one of which is in Augusta.

Over the past month EMDC has had 85 referrals of which 5 were Youth-specific and 12 were QUEST. During this time, they had 16 new registrations: 4 were youth, 4 Adults, 2 DW and 6 QUEST. All the new referrals, except youth, are contacted by a WDS "referral specialist" who does an initial screening before sending to a "permanent" workforce development specialist. This process has taken place for over a month, and they are finding that it allows WDS to focus more time on enrolled customers.

She also stated that they have hired 2 additional Workforce Development Specialists staff who will start on August 14<sup>th</sup>, filling 3 of the 4 "regular" Workforce Development Specialists vacancies, and have an additional 3 candidates to interview.

Patti gave a brief overview of some of the projects that are continuing. She stated that these include the St. Mary's CMA certification and education program. The last class of 9 participants recently completed the courses and they are beginning a new course soon. The Medical Assistant training program with Spruce Mountain is also seeing good results. The Oxford Hills project saw the participants without a place to complete their clinicals and Marianne was able to find each of them a place to do their clinicals to complete the training. The pathway healthcare training with Razell is also doing well and a new course is starting soon.

EMDC is working with Coastal Counties and Workforce Solutions in connection with their Afghan grant for refugees. Participants are mostly from Androscoggin County. Patti will provide more on this at the next meeting as it is new to them at this time.

Patti met with county commissioner Dave Duguay and county commissioner Donald Dura to discuss the need for both dispatchers and corrections officers. Donald is currently checking on possible training projects. There will also be more to this as it comes to fruition in the upcoming months.

Patti also met with Hawkeye Optics, a broadband company that builds and lays fiber optic cable, to discuss a draft OJT. With a draft contract in place, EMDC will be ready when Hawkeye is ready to hire a new member of their team.

EMDC recently met with the students from the AFL/CIO apprenticeship program and were able to enroll one of the students who followed through to the end of the program. He will be starting employment this week, and they were able to assist him in obtaining the tools he needs for his new position. They were also contacted by the General Contractors Group located in Augusta for state coverage who are starting to send in referrals and will be another good connection for participants.

Cathy asked how those people who are unemployed that were mentioned earlier in the report are contacted. Is this something EMDC does directly or do these people come to EMDC for assistance? Patti explained that in these situations the state will send notice of the upcoming closures or layoffs directly to the employees prior to it happening in an email blast that will let them know about available services. EMDC does not have a list of these people, so it is up to them to contact services in their area.

Erin further explained that the state has a program called "Rapid Response" that requires employers with 50 or more employees to let the state know when layoffs or closures are going to happen. This will prompt the state to send in a RETI team, which usually includes staff from WIOA, the Career Center, Unemployment, etc. to talk with the employees on site before the layoff or closure takes place to discuss services available to them and assist with the next steps. Patti stated that due to the small employee numbers in these places they did not fall into this category of requirement for notice. There is a Rapid Response meeting that takes place monthly that EMDC attends to maintain current information on these layoffs and closures and to make sure that the state is aware as well.

Cathy questioned if rumors of Sappi closing were true. Erin stated that they had recently invested in new equipment and training dollars for the site and that there was nothing on a possible closure.

Erin backtracked to the fact that EMDC is not responsible for finding clinical sites for participants and that Marianne went above and beyond to make that happen. It is also a testament to how well she is doing and her outreach and networking within the community that she was able to make those connections and set-up clinicals for them all.

### **Board Update**

Erin mentioned that she had discussed with Patti that moving forward she will give her providers update at the beginning of the meeting and then leave unless otherwise needed. This allows Patti to attend to her business without being in the meeting longer than necessary.

Erin reached out to Amanda Cooley from Kennebec Savings Bank on the possibility of her joining the board. She is not interested but will look into anyone on the Senior Leadership team that may fit the criteria and be interested in joining. Erin is confident that someone from Kennebec Savings will step up for a role on the board. David Duguay has given a few names for possible members as well. Erin is still attempting to get contact information for someone from Nine Dragons. Erin asked Cathy about her contact with the HR lady, Lisa or someone she may suggest from the hospital, but Cathy has not reached out yet and will call her. Erin met with Matt Underwood from KV Cog to discuss WIOA and WIOA services. He stated that he was unaware of the programs and that he will take the information to the business and community contacts he has to spread the information further as well as reach possible board members.

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

Erin sent the board a copy of the RFA and application to review and has posted it on the CWMWDB website. She reached out to the Maine Association of Non-Profits to see if they would also post it on their site and let their members know but has not heard back. She also reached out directly to a few nonprofits that we have worked with in the past. One of these nonprofits is in Western Maine, Oxford County and they work with the recovery population. She also sent it to a woman who helps Tree Street Youth, and the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies write grants. She will need board members to review applications that come in, Patti will serve on the board as they are the recipients of the referrals, as well as Angelina Klouthis Jean, who is the project manager.

Chris will serve if he is able to fit it into his schedule. A discussion on the timeframe for review was had, the timeframe posted is a deadline for questions on August 18th with responses posted on August 21<sup>st</sup>, and a deadline for applications of September 5<sup>th</sup>. Chris provided his personal email and phone number for contact to meet the week after the deadline to review the applications. Erin would like to make the announcement by October 1<sup>st</sup> and will reach out to Diane Frigon on possibly being the last board member needed.

Erin shared her screen to go over the EDA grant information that was shared at the last full board meeting. The “recompete grant” was discussed at a meeting with MDF that included Galen Williamson who works in the Northeast region to apply for monies for the Sappi training. Somerset has the lowest age labor force participation rate of the five counties. The state is around 82% and Somerset County is 75% with Oxford County at 75%. This is the greatest among the primary age group of 25 to 54, which is why we are focusing on it so heavily to help with training that will keep current employees working. Erin reached out to Sappi’s contact, Amy Herrick, and asked what the percentage of people need training and was told 221, with 74% of these being 25-54 years of age. However, after meeting with all parties she is not confident that this is the right avenue as the grant is very competitive with the first round being to obtain planning money or turn in your idea without a request for funds, or request money for

planning and research. It is along the lines of the Build Back Better that Maine did not receive but provided MDF with a lot of information on how best to move forward with these types of grants. There will be 6 applicants picked for the funding split. We will continue to work with MDF to look at alternate options for funding and assisting with training.

Chris mentioned that they are working with the University of Maine and the state on their ED grant which focuses on the forest-based economy and forestry and does not advise putting in for this funding as he is hopeful this grant will yield better results. MDF is not included in this grant, but Erin suggested reaching out to them as they are heavily invested in this type of forestry industry. Chris stated that funding will touch MDF and that to his knowledge they are putting in their own application.

An update on the MDOT and the \$500,000 ARPA grant that Galen put through was discussed. The proposal for purchasing vehicles was turned down, but Samantha Dina of the Governor's Office suggested talking to the MDOT who was given \$5 million dollars for different grants. Boyne Resort and Timber HP were both awarded grants through this funding, but there is still \$1.4million available. A meeting with Ryan Neal from the MDOT that included Samantha took place recently, and there is a scheduled meeting with ITN, a network independent people who had a grant denied due to a lack of focus on workforce. Galen and Erin are putting together a grant request that will go to the board once it's ready for review.

Erin attended a session from MDOT that is working with the legislature to create a bus route running from Portland to Lewiston. There are 3 plans focusing on workforce and creating stops that are around clusters of businesses, with few to no secondary stops. Erin will send this proposal to the board to see how this may benefit the working community and transportation needs.

Josh Henry mentioned at the last full board meeting a dire need for electricians specializing in instrument and control electrical work. Erin has reached out to the HR person at Timber HP, Cianbro, Hutamaki and Sappi to schedule a meeting to discuss this need and how to make training and certifications work best. A poll will be sent by Carrie to schedule the best day and time to get everyone together for this discussion. Currently colleges and community colleges offer a 1-year certificate or a 2-year Associates Degree to become an electrician, and there are apprenticeships as well, but these programs do not focus on the specific electrical needs that some companies are seeing. Chris will reach out to Rick Reardon, the chair of the electrical department at Eastern Maine Community College and Elizabeth Fortin at KVCC and Dwayne Conway at CMCC as they would add additional information to this discussion with their expertise in the area. Erin is looking to have the meeting within the first few weeks of September, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> to work around everyone's schedules.

Cathy asked Chris if electrical programs are offered in high schools. Chris stated that there are classes offered within the schools that have requirements including field hours, which both the CTEs and the Community College system has waivers for some of the hours because of the instructor programs that are delivered that allow these courses to feed into college and apprenticeship needs. He mentioned that these courses do not go beyond the general electricians' programs and do not include the instrument and control training that is being investigated and needed.

With free community college and profitable careers Cathy would think that participants would be large, Chris stated that it is not participation, but instructor needs that create issues a lot of the time. Pay rates within the field are not competitive with educator fees and cause a lack of instructor availability. Erin mentioned that businesses could utilize senior workers or retired electricians to instruct courses at a field range or close to it.

Erin attended the graduation for the ALF-CIO for the apprenticeship union construction program and went over who was there to speak and a little about the event. She also took Sue LeClair up on her offer to tour the Career Centers in both Augusta and Hinkley and wanted to remind everyone that she is more than willing to schedule herself anywhere that she is needed.

### **Financial Update**

Sara gave an overview to the board but stated there was not much information to review since we are one month into the fiscal year, and she is still working on closing July but is waiting for invoices to finish. She recently finished the quarterly reports and has not heard any negative feedback on them. She is working on PY23 but due to changes in personnel at the MDOL it is taking time to work through. She stated that contract amounts aren't adding up because of rounding which is creating some of the hassle.

She is still working on getting Chris set up as the Treasurer, although he became the Treasurer when the board voted him in, there are still a few steps in the process remaining. He was added to Bangor Savings Bank two weeks ago. Chris mentioned that having a secondary signer on the account makes sense in emergency situations. Sarah and Erin have discussed this as well and it was agreed that Cathy would be the best fit as secondary signer. This will be presented to the board for a vote at the next full board meeting. Due to Chris not being officially on the Bangor Savings account, we haven't been able to disperse payments. Sara will be doing a "check run" this week as we are not allowed to hold federal funds, everything is done electronically and she described this process with regards to receiving invoices for payment, Erin approving them and then having them sent to Chris for approval before they are either paid electronically or a check is sent if that is requested by the vendor.

Sara is still working on the change of address with the IRS and recently a letter regarding the July request for change was delivered to the office saying that the DocuSign form was not approved, and an actual signature was needed. We set up DocuSign as we were told that this is acceptable on a federal and state level, so Sara is going to investigate that. In the meantime, she will work with Erin to get the signatures needed and resubmit the change of address as nothing else can be changed until IRS approval for change is complete. Chris suggested that Sara talk with someone in government to help expedite the process as well. Erin stated that she has already gone directly to the Kennebec registry, site of former office, to have the address updated with them.

### **Executive Session**

An executive session was called.

### **Adjourn**

Chair Cathy Witherspoon adjourned the meeting at 9:38am.

Next meeting: Wednesday, September 13, 2023, 8:30am-9:30am

### **ED Outreach since last Operations Meeting**

7/13/2023 met with Megan Dichter from MDOE to discuss Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) and the MDOE contribution. Attended a Workforce GPS workshop entitled: Increasing Equitable Service Access and Employment Outcomes for All Jobseekers in WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs.

\*7/14/2023 met with Donald Durrah, Oxford County Administrator, David Duguay, Oxford County Commissioner, and Patti Saarinen from EMDC to discuss the possibilities of a workforce project for dispatchers. Discussed other needs for correction officers. Also attended an information session for an EDA pilot project grant focused on areas that have a lower percentage of primary working age (25-54) labor participation rate. Somerset and Oxford Counties are eligible.

7/18/2023 met with staff from Youthbuild to discuss Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) and their contribution. Also met with the Economic Development Director and the Mainstreet Director from Gardiner. I talked about how we might be able to help employers in their area through WIOA.

7/19/2023 hosted One Stop Partners meeting.

\*7/21/2023 attended the official ribbon cutting (log sawing) ceremony at Timber HP in Madison. In attendance: Governor Mills, Commissioner Heather Johnson, Senator Susan Collins, Representative Jared Golden. Ali Zaidi (Assistant to the President & National Climate Advisor), and Brian Brashaw (Assistant Director of Wood Innovation Program for USDA Forest Service).

\*7/24/2023 met with union representatives Grant Provost (Iron Workers), Adam Wilson (SMART), and Jason Shedlock (Laborers' International Union) about how we can work more closely with unions in our region and help participants get into union apprenticeships.

7/25/2023 met with Sam Boss about participants in the pre-apprenticeship program and how we could see who might be eligible for WIOA, so they could be enrolled to help with the financial transition into apprenticeship.

7/27/2023 met with Augusta Adult Ed director to talk about partnering. She was very interested. I shared information regarding EMDC's Patti and Marianne. Marianne is meeting with her today.

8/1/2023 met with Ryan Neale from MDOT and Samantha Dina from the Governor's office, and Galan Williamson from NWDB to discuss transportation grants. Attended MDOT's public meetings on the bus route from Portland to Lewiston.

8/2/2023 visited Sue at the Augusta Career Center and volunteered at Taste of Waterville event.

8/3/2023 visited Sue at the Hinckley Career Center and attended the Union Construction pre-apprenticeship graduation ceremony.

8/4/2023 met with EMDC's new HR director.

8/7/2023 met with MDF and others on EDA Recompete grant.

8/8/2023 met with Matt Underwood at KVCOG. Explained WIOA and how he might spread the work to some of his businesses. Met with Amanda Cooley from Kennebec Savings bank about board membership. She is going to try to find someone among their leadership team to serve.