

Minutes approved on
January 25, 2024



Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting
October 26, 2023

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Sue LeClair; Diane Frigon; Josh Henry; Chris Winstead; Jim Trundy

Board Members Absent: Trampus Hutches; Bruce Tisdale; Kendra Wheeler; Monique Roy; Adam Wilson; Kate Durkin

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

Others Present: Sara McLaughlin, Contracted Financial Manager; Tom Fernands, EMDC; Patti Saarinen, EMDC; Joe Pietroski, Kennebec County Commissioner; John Alsop, Somerset County Commissioner; Sharisse Roberts, Rehab. Consultant, MDOL-DVBI; Josh Brown, MDOL

1. Welcome and Introductions:

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:35am. All those present introduced themselves. Due to current events (the mass shooting in Lewiston) some participants were running late to the meeting so the agenda that was sent out to everyone was adjusted as needed.

2. Service Provider Report—EMDC, Patti Saarinen:

Patti stated that due to current situations within the area, all EMDC and Career Center staff are working remotely and that the Career Center is closed until the lock-down order is lifted.

EMDC enrolled 15 new Adults and the plan was for 16, so they are on target for new enrollments. The difference is that the implementation schedule listed 70 carry-ins (people who did not complete last year and carried into the new year). After the end of 90 days, their actual carry-in number is 34 people.

They enrolled 5 new Dislocated Workers (DW) and the plan was for 13, so they are behind the target for new enrollments. Part of this is due to the ability of jobs and DWs entering new employment quickly before they enroll in a training program. EMDC also diverted some DW numbers to the QUEST grant. The implementation schedule listed 29 carry-ins. At the end of the 90 days, the actual carry-in number was 22, so not far off the mark.

Also enrolled were 3 in-school-youth (ISY) and 6 (OSY) out-of-school youth and the plan was for 6 ISY and 14 OSY new enrollments. This was due to a bit of a slow start this first quarter, but numbers are starting to pick up and EMDC will continue to monitor. The implementation schedule listed 70 carry-ins and came in with 38. The new Director of Youth Services met with Erin, and they have adjusted the enrollment numbers to reflect this change.

An increase in referrals across all 5 counties and not just in Kennebec and Androscoggin is being seen, which is one of the goals.

Three new workforce development specialists were hired this quarter. One of them is based in the Franklin/Somerset area; one is based in Northern Oxford also assisting with Franklin; and the third is based in Androscoggin but can assist in any county as needed. Having these 3 positions filled will be a great help in meeting numbers and reaching customers. Also hired was the Director of Youth Services, Karyssa Murchinson. Karyssa came to EMDC for Jobs for Maine Graduates and is already fitting right in. She covers all 9 counties served by EMDC; however, staff in CWM will be assisting as they have been right along.

A meeting with the upper management of FedCap to discuss ways to collaborate more closely and braid our funding was held, and they are in the process of having local meetings around the 5 counties to establish line staff relationships between the two programs.

They developed 7 youth work experiences, one with a new business, Daddy O's in Oxford Co. and spoke with 10 businesses regarding WE opportunities.

They met with students in the AFL-CIO training program in Lewiston and assisted a new hire at the Ironworkers Local 7 with tools and are hoping to assist more workers who are looking for work with the unions.

Employer Projects:

EMDC has 29 participants currently enrolled and 24 have recently completed resulting in 53 people receiving WIOA assistance through projects.

Cert. Med. Asst. with Gray/New Gloucester Ad Ed and St. Mary's.
Training began August 30 with 9 students in attendance. EMDC is funding 7.

Foundation/PSS/CNA Healthcare Pathway with Lewiston Adult Ed started 8.21.23. This is a stackable credential model where one training level feeds into the next leading to more job stability and advancement opportunities.

The new cohort started 8.21.23. EMDC supports 11 students. This is a registered apprenticeship training.

CNA at Region 9 Adult Ed. In No. Oxford County.
Start date 10/10/23. There are 5 students enrolled and supported by EMDC.

CDL Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Ed. So. Oxford County
Start date 10.03.23. EMDC is supporting 3 students for this training.

Culinary Arts Spruce Mountain Adult Ed

Start date 10.12.23. This is a 10-week training leading to a Kitchen Manager certification. EMDC is supporting 3 students.

Recently Completed:

Cert. Med. Asst. with Spruce Mt Ad Ed and Franklin Memorial Hospital. Class began 4/4/2023. Ten accepted into the training - 7 supported by EMDC: 2 adult, 3 OSY, 1 Quest, 1 CWO.

Update: Of the 5 students that completed, 4 have passed the NHA. All students finished clinical hours and we're waiting for Certificates of Completion.

Oxford Hills Nezinscot Adult Education CCMA Training started on March 28, 2023. There were 4 students accepted and all 4 were supported by EMDC; 2 Adult, 1 DW, 1 OSY.

Update: 3 students are in clinical phase of training. Two are at St. Mary's. One is at Concentra in Oxford. One student who started clinicals at St. Mary's is now finishing clinicals at Western Maine Family Health in Jay.

CNA Training at Mount Blue Adult Education – EMDC is providing supportive services to all 4. (3 Quest, 1 CWO)

Update: All completed the program and passed the CNA exam; we are assisting with placement but expect all to have employed soon. Employment has been verified for 1 of the students so far. He is working at a rehab facility making \$26.75 per hour.

Personal Support Specialist and CNA pathway with Lewiston Adult Education. This is a stackable credential model where one training level feeds into the next leading to more job stability and advancement opportunities.

PSS Mod 1; 2 of the 6 students were enrolled with EMDC

PSS Mod 2: 3 students enrolled with EMDC

CNA Mod 3: 3 students from PSS Mod 2 plus 4 more students enrolled with EMDC. This class started in July.

3. Approve Meeting Minutes:

VOTED: To approve the July 27, 2023, meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Chris Winstead **Second:** Cathy Witherspoon **Vote:** All in Favor

4. Board Business—Razell Ward:

Approval of updated policies: Financial Manual, OJT, ITA, Youth Additional Assistance Barrier, and Youth Incentive was sent previous to the meeting by Erin for everyone to review. No one had any additions or notes that needed discussion and a vote to approve updated policies was held.

Motion: Laurie Glidden **Second:** Chris Winstead **Vote:** All in Favor

5. Financial Update: PY23 budget—Sara McLaughlin:

Sara gave an overview of the PY23 budget as it stands through September 2023 that was listed by grants expiring first and going down to those expiring last.

The Opioid contract has been spent with 99% spending represented in the report as of September. When reviewing the spending thus far everything is on par with where it should be and now that the Opioid contract is complete and expires in December, Sara expects an increase in spending within other contracts.

The approved budget was reviewed and again there was nothing alarming to Sara and she feels that the budget is accurate and that there should be no surprise expenses coming.

6. Update on Maine Economic Development Strategy & Workforce Vision:

Erin sent everyone Chris Quint's 10YR Economic and Development plan as well as links to various materials around the subject before the meeting. She gave a brief overview of the report and the recent listening sessions that were held to update the status of the work as well as get feedback from the workforce community. Tom Fernands stated that he was able to attend the latest listening session and was pleasantly surprised by not only the number of people in attendance but also the discussions that took place during the event.

Erin will be sending out an email that will include a link for a survey that she encourages everyone to share and participate in as the information is vital for continuing changes and focus on specific areas of improvement with this plan and implementation.

7. Review of Committees and Focus Groups:

The Youth Committee is now fully established with Laurie Glidden agreeing to chair. Erin is continuing to reach out to people who may be able to join the committee and encourages anyone who wants to take part to contact her. Joe Pietroski asked who the youth are that will be part of the committee to which Erin explained that everyone on the committee works directly with youth in the community. However, both Shannon Saxby from YLAT and Karyssa Murchinson from EMDC will assist with garnering youth interest in membership as most youth are paid to participate on these types of committees. She expects that other members of the committee will also suggest youth who may join as well and is always willing to reach out to anyone that is suggested from members of the board and partnering organizations as well.

8. Executive Director's Report:

On Wednesday, October 25, Commissioner Fortman, on behalf of the Maine Department of Labor, requested a federal waiver that would allow asylum seekers to seek a job more quickly after arriving in the country. New Mainers must wait at least 6 months for a work authorization. With Maine's unemployment rate sitting at 2.7%, the efforts to help New Mainers get into the workforce sooner rather than later could be a big win for the state.

The Request for Application (RFA) for Community-Based Organizations (CBO) as part of the QUEST grant, was released on August 7, 2023, with a due date of September 5. The RFA stated that a CBO would be selected to serve each of the Board's five counties. The \$54,000 allotted in

the QUEST grant was added to \$90,000 from the Board's ARPA grant to allow for an award of \$28,800 per county. The goal of the grant is to develop a referral pipeline into the Quest grant and other WIOA grants. Unfortunately, very few agencies applied, some feeling the amount was too insignificant. A small group of board members served as a committee to review applications on September 22. Western Maine Community Action (WMCA) received awards for Oxford and Franklin Counties. A discussion will ensue about a target audience. Maine Re-Entry Network (MRN) received awards for Kennebec and Somerset Counties and will focus on the re-entry from incarceration and recovery population. Maine Immigration & Refugee Services (MEIRS) received an award for Androscoggin and will focus on the New Mainer population. Contracts are being developed for the agencies.

Based on comments made by board member Josh Henry at the July board meeting regarding the widespread need for specialty electricians, the ED brought together four major companies for a discussion in mid-September. The meeting included representatives from TimberHP, Cianbro, Sappi, and Huhtamaki, as well as the Maine Community College System (MCCS), a local union, and a representative of the Associated General Contractors of Maine to discuss the needs and potential resolutions. The MCCS representative (board member Chris Winstead) shared that a curriculum for an E&I training program had been developed by Eastern Maine Development Corporation. A meeting is planned for October 31 with the EMCC instructor to see if the training will meet the needs of the companies and what the delivery might look like to be most efficient for all. The goal is to upskill current electricians and backfill with recent community college graduates or apprentices.

Board ED also met with three broadband experts: a manager of Consolidated Communications, an owner of a small contracting company, and the director of the National Digital Equity Center to get a better understanding of the future needs of the industry, and the levels of trainings and workforce needed in the region to meet the federal investments coming to states over the next five years. The small business owner is requesting training in a module style delivery that will upskill current employees and train new workers. Another meeting is scheduled for October 30 and will include the MCCS and KVCC. The Maine Connectivity Authority also met with the ED and small business owner to share what training currently exists.

ED, along with an EMDC staff member, will attend the Youth Symposium in Las Vegas in early November.

The hope is to discover best practices around the country that can be incorporated into the youth strategy for the central western region.

ED participated in the MDOL state monitoring on September 25 and was very impressed with the level of knowledge and professionalism displayed by the EMDC front line staff. ED and admin assistant engaged in the monitoring of the board on October 3, and are still awaiting the report from MDOL. ED also participated, along with the ED from NWDB and EMDC staff, in the state monitoring of the One Stop Operator. EMDC has not really picked up the duties of the OSO

but understands its responsibility to do so in the future. Still awaiting the official report from MDOL.

ED is working to get all 13 WIOA required partners to agree to an extension of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA). Both documents, which are typically signed for a three-year period, were done in June of 2022 as part of the task to remove the board from high-risk status. Since there were no board staff during the time of the signing, both documents were created for a one-year shelf life. As of July 1, 2023, the board is out of compliance. ED worked with MDOL for a simple resolution, and with approval from the Maine Attorney General's Office, has been working with all partners to agree to a one-year extension. There remain only a few partners who have not sent in their email of agreement. ED hopes to have this done by mid-November.

9. Other/New Business:

There was no other or new board business to discuss at this time.

Sharisse Roberts from MDOL used this time to introduce herself as she was not able to join in the meeting from the start. She is a Rehabilitation Consultant with the Department of Labor and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. She explained that her role is outreach with community businesses and employers to discuss accommodations, training, and employment opportunities and how to build relationships with community resources and organizations to assist with DVBI participants to garner employment opportunities that employers and businesses may not be aware are being missed. Erin gave a brief introduction to Sharisse and Patti Saarinen as this would be a great connection for Sharisse in the future.

Josh Henry took a few minutes during this time to express his appreciation to Erin for all of the work that she has done thus far and upcoming work that he is excited to be a part of as both a board member and part of the workforce community. It was unanimously agreed upon that the efforts put forth by Erin has significantly educated those on the board as well as community businesses and organizations on what CWMWDB does and ways that they can benefit from those services and resources.

10. Adjourn Meeting:

VOTED: To adjourn meeting at 9:34am.

Motion: Chris Winstead **Second:** Laurie Glidden **Vote:** All in Favor

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday January 25, 2024, 8:30am-10:30am via ZOOM

ED Outreach since last Board 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.

8/11/2023 spoke with Simon Thorne from Consolidated Communications to get an understanding of what job opportunities would be available with the influx of all the broadband money. He gave me a breakdown of the work needed to be done immediately—mostly being done by contracted workers—and what might be steady employment in Maine for the industry moving forward. Very interesting conversation.

8/15/2023 attended a FAME workshop on the new FAFSA that will be used for the fall of 2024. Informational documents were sent to EMDC's staff so they would be prepared to help participants apply for financial aid if they were going into training that is eligible for financial aid.

8/15/2023 met with Erica Watson of the Maine Development Foundation regarding the work they are doing with the forestry industry. They received a grant in November 2022 to focus on this industry and define 15 forestry occupations. They did four focus groups, with one of them in Livermore Falls. There is a workforce committee that includes industry leadership, CTEs, Adult Education, and the Maine Community College System. She invited ED to participate on the committee.

8/16/2023 CWMWDB and NWDB executive directors met EMDC CEO, Lee Umphrey, to discuss the leadership turnover within the organization, most recently the abrupt departure of VP Tracey Colley after 3 months and the departure of youth director, Madeline Bradfield after less than a year. Lee said they were in the process of filling both positions with the former being downgraded to a director position.

8/17/2023 attended the Maine Hire a Vet event at the Augusta Civic Center. Spoke to several businesses about WIOA and OJTs. Connected two with apprenticeship staff.

8/25/2023 virtually attended a meeting with staff who support veterans: Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP), Local Veterans Employers Representative (LVER), and Veteran Readiness Employment (VRE). I talked about WIOA and ways that we might work together. I connected the staff member from LVER, who meets with employers in the CWM region to talk about hiring vets, with EMDC's Marianne Young who does business outreach in the region. The two could talk about their work, exchange ideas on good businesses with whom to work, and maybe figure out how the two programs might partner.

8/29/2023 attended the Fidium Fiber-Consolidated Communications ribbon cutting at the Hathaway Creative Center in Waterville. Opportunity to meet in person Simon Thorne who I had chatted with over the phone about the broadband industry in Maine.

8/31/2023 met over zoom with Jen Hogan from Community Federal Credit Union to discuss their Financial & Life Navigator Program for businesses to understand how it might be offered to more businesses.

8/31/2023 connected Jenna Kuun from Norway Savings Bank with an apprenticeship staff member and Michaela Charles from Somerset Career & Technical Center (SCTC). SCTC had done an apprenticeship with a local bank in Skowhegan, and I mentioned this to Jenna when I met her at the Maine Hire a Vet event. This was an opportunity for her to learn of how her bank might benefit from the same strategy.

9/1/2023 virtually attended the Governor's Opioid Response Seminar Series. Was surprised to discover that two of the Central Western Maine region's counties had among the highest Suspected Opioid Overdose Rate per 10,000 people: Androscoggin had the highest and Somerset the third highest.

9/8/2023 attended the State Workforce Board meeting held at Jackson Lab. Received a tour of the facility, which was very interesting. Connected with an individual who runs a summer program for youth.

9/12/2023 made a presentation regarding WIOA during a Lunch & Learn at the Franklin County Adult Education program in Farmington. EMDC staff were in attendance too.

9/12/2023 attended the ReStart Program Coordinating Committee quarterly meeting. Several people presented on the workforce system. I explained how the board connected all the pieces.

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.

10/12/2023 met with EMDC's new Director of Youth Services, Karyssa Murchison. She worked within the JMG program for five years and is eager to connect across our central western Maine region to engage youth in WIOA employment programs.

10/13/2023 met with President Betsy Libby of Central Maine Community College.

10/16/2023 met with EMDC's Patti Saarinen and the manager of the Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment program (RESEA), provided by Unemployment Insurance. The program is for (UI) claimants who qualify and offers opportunities such as one-on-one coaching and relevant services to help them on their reemployment journey. We talked about ways that RESEA and WIOA can work together. The manager set up a meeting with the direct staff in the CM region, so Patti could talk to them about WIOA 1B and referrals. Also attended the Stabilizing Your Workforce presentation at CMCC sponsored by Community Credit Union and the LA Chamber. The presenter talked about the struggles of those living in poverty and what pitfalls happen when trying to maintain steady employment. She offered suggestions about how employers could create a more conducive environment that would help employees remain.

10/17/2023 presented to the Workforce Practitioners meeting in Waterville about the board's focus in workforce development. Sue LeClair asked me to make the presentation.

10/18/2023 attended the State Workforce Board and DECD's Listening Session in Fairfield. Diane Frigon attended. Nice, energized crowd with good ideas.

10/18/2023 facilitated the quarterly One Stop Partner meeting.

10/19/2023 attended the GrowSmart Maine summit in Waterville. Rumford, Norway, and Skowhegan were towns featured during the Community Spotlight section. I talked with each of the people staffing the presentations.

10/20/2023 attended a meeting for input into the Governor's new Office of New Americans. Those in attendance expressed their thoughts of what the new office could do to improve support for New Americans and helping them get into employment.

10/25/2023 met with Peter Osborne of the Maine Municipal Association to discuss the shortage of workers interested in municipal jobs.