

**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Operations Committee Minutes
December 11, 2024**

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

Others Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant; Sara McLaughlin, Financial Analyst, Loretta Alley, Workforce Services Director, EMDC

Call to Order

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:32am.

Review and Approval of the Last Meeting Minutes

Voted: Approval of the November 13, 2024, meeting minutes.

Motion: Chris Winstead

Second: Grant Provost

Vote: All present in favor

Provider Report-Loretta

Loretta stated that EMDC is doing well in the WIOA programs with Adult enrollments at 104%, which has vastly improved from last year. They have 104 out of 106 adults. Dislocated Workers are at 41 of 47, which she explained is good since it has been very difficult finding enrollees with the open job market within Maine. In-School Youth are 10 out of 19 and Out-Of-School Youth is 58 out of 54 which is 90.4% for youth. She mentioned that Quest is an area of concern for EMDC, but that they continue to work diligently on that, and she is meeting with Erin later in the morning to discuss it further. They will work on spending down the Quest funding as they are currently at 97 of 158, which is 61%. Loretta stated that the plan around Quest is to do more on-the-job training to spend that money down and provide maximum services for jobs for 6 months and the support services along with that.

Regarding training, EMDC staff attended the “Bridges Out of Poverty” training. They also have in-house training and WIOA updates every Tuesday morning. The meeting yesterday focused on job placement and MSGs. Apprenticeship opportunities for individuals and incarceration training were also attended by staff.

EMDC is at 187 referrals since the November Operations Committee meeting, and a majority of those were from the My Maine Future campaign, with BES, Fryeburg Academy, regional Adult Ed programs, The Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, the Waterville Shelter, which was a new organization for referrals for EMDC, and Wings, EMDC staff and self-referrals. Everyone at EMDC is working very hard to get these referrals processed.

Loretta met with the Rapid Response team on Monday regarding a few places that are closing their doors. These include a flower shop in Lewiston, St. Mary’s ICU who have hopes to keep most of the medical staff, LL Beans seasonal closure across Maine, however they do not want a Rapid Response scheduled.

There has been a lot of community partner outreach with Lewiston Adult Ed, Auburn Adult Ed, Spruce Mountain Vocational Rehab, MSAD 52, Somerset County Connect, MEIRS, the Maine Job Corp, the Economic Equity Summit for transportation and housing, the second chance hiring a vet event, and the resource fair in Franklin County. Employer contacts that have been made include Ware-Butler, T & L Garage in Lewiston, Tractor Supply, CMCC, and Angstrom for an OJT.

Loretta stated that everyone misses Patti dearly and hopes that she is enjoying retirement. She also stated that the staff are coming together with the changes of her leaving and are doing a tremendous job. EMDC is doing some organizational structure shifts to incorporate senior workforce staff with people in the region to mentor and help new staff and they are doing a great job. And she is thankful for her team.

Financial Report-Sara

Sara shared the updated budget and financials November 30th through December 11th. Reviewing spending by open contracts it shows that CWMWDB has spent 100% of the PY23 WIOA funds and are 13% into spending the PY24 WIOA funding with EMDC at 48% of their PY23 spending and none of the PY24 spending currently. Sara explained that EMDC recently finished spending their PY22 funds and so she expects to see their PY23 spending ramp up. She explained that with the restriction EMDC has on their spending it is not uncommon for them to spend at a slower rate than CWMWDB and so these number differences are not alarming to her. If at the end of the fiscal year the numbers are still off, then she and Erin will work closely with EMDC to ensure spending is completed by the contract end date.

There has been no activity on the Career contract that was extended since Sara's last report where the small increase was given because there is no executed copy of the contract yet, so we are unable to draw off that at this time.

Both Quest and ARPA received no cost extensions and we've been spending those. We were out front on the admin spending for Quest because of the original expiration date but that has now slowed down with EMDC catching up to us and the new end date of September 2025 to spend it out. All the ARPA money is being managed by us with none going to EMDC. That is where the money for both the CBO mini grants and the Fuseideas marketing campaign comes from. We have spent about a fifth to a quarter of those funds after receiving some invoices from Fuseideas for the campaign spending.

Sara recapped that we are into spending our PY24 WIOA and EMDC will not start spending on this until they finish spending the PY23 funds and she does not expect to see them dip into the PY24 funding until sometime next year.

With no questions she moved into the CWMWDB actuals versus the budget through November 30th which is at 42% of the budget. This breakdown shows the same contracts across the top showing what period they span, what the total award is, what we've already spent in prior fiscal years, what we plan to spend in future fiscal years, and the remainder of which becomes our budget for this year, which is \$474,000. The document then goes through line-item details of how that budget is broken down and we've seen it before. Through November we are at 45% of the budget, which is a little high and we normally run a little behind. This is largely because of the marketing invoices that came from Fuseideas bringing them to 93% of their contract. The rest of the program money that we're managing for Quest

and ARPA, the CBO mini grants are at \$13,000 out of a budget of \$127,000. So overall at 45% of the budget, the contractual programs and outreach along with the marketing and advertising that is usually skewing the numbers is being spent at about the same rate as our other spending, so we aren't seeing that skew in numbers so much anymore.

Erin added that we will be putting out extensions for all three CBOs and that she has already written a contract extending the CBOs for another year. The contracts were scheduled to sunset at the end of the month, but this way they can have a no-cost extension for the end of next year to use the funds. She meets with some of the CBOs monthly and some of them on a quarterly basis. MEIRS is doing well with 39% of their referrals having turned into enrollments. None of the Maine Reentry Networks referrals have yielded any enrollments, so Erin met with them and EMDC to discuss what they can do to make better referrals and what EMDC can do to increase the conversion of referral to enrollment. She explained that the same thing happened with the Opioid grant where over 700 referrals didn't yield high enrollments.

She also mentioned that we can spend formula grant funding regardless of what EMDC spends. This is not the case for Quest, which is a National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG). The board must draw down at the same rate as EMDC, which means if EMDC does not spend their funding, we cannot spend our funding. She's been monitoring it for months and sending emails regarding this concern, including one at the end of November stating how many people were enrolled versus how many people need to be enrolled by the end of the month, and what it means for enrollment numbers to make their quota. They have typically been drawing down \$14,000 bi-weekly, so if they continue to do that, they will end up leaving \$300,000 unspent funds. She and Sara will be meeting with EMDC's financial administrator and workforce directors to review the budget today to ensure they spend their money on the people who need it and ensure we can spend ours.

Chris asked Erin to give a reminder of what the Quest money pays for and the population that it serves. She stated that it serves the same people as the formula grants with special attention to people in recovery, individuals with some kind of justice involvement, new Mainers, low-income and women with children. MDOL is also asking to focus on participants who want to enter training courses and careers in healthcare, green energy, and infrastructure. Green energy has been an issue, healthcare is successful, and infrastructure is gaining success with our work with the Union Construction Academy and the AGC Construction Academy. Chris asked if training was paid for, would it provide the wrap around support for those individuals, which Erin stated that it would. Chris would like to connect with Erin and Dwayne and Elizabeth because with their targeted curriculum in those areas, they might be able to refer participants for Quest services. Erin said that she would like to do this since she has talked with them herself, and they said they give this information to those who come into the door, but the information needs to go to individuals before they enroll. KVCC has started doing ZOOM meetings when someone shows interest in programs to go over the courses and she asked if we could participate in those. She did go to one of them, but she hasn't been invited to any others and is unsure if they've held any more of them. Chris said he is happy to do that as he is aware that a big challenge is that college folks are quick to enroll people into programs for fear seats will be lost. In a lot of cases, they are enrolled into funded programs that they feel will benefit and reduce the ineligibility factor of support services from WIOA because of the qualifications of eligibility prior to enrollment. He also shared that a conversation has

been taking place to bring MCCS and the Adult Ed partners together with the WIOA partners all in one session to discuss funding and how to weave that together as Maine Jobs & Recovery Program sunsets. Chris will be sending out information on this as he is looking to hold an in-person session.

Razell wanted clarification around Quest, stating that her understanding is that when they have participants coming in for various training pieces, EMDC chooses the grant to cover their funding needs. Erin said that this is accurate and EMDC will choose the grant based off which program will best suit the eligibility parameters of individuals, as well as their training and career goals. An example she used is the New Mainers that are participating in the healthcare training through Lewiston Adult Ed are mostly funded through Quest versus WIOA, but both programs offer the same benefits. Razell wanted to make sure there was nothing more that Lewiston Adult Ed can do to help with spending down the Quest funding. She is hoping the upcoming trade academy and a phlebotomy course will assist with the spending and enrollment needs.

Chris asked Sara about a backup for approving timecards and payments for any time, including his upcoming trip away, that Chris is unable to connect and approve that. She said that we do not, but that this is easy to fix. Razell volunteered to be the backup for Chris while he is away and at any other time in the future that it is needed. Chris and Razell will connect once Sara gets the log-ins completed to show her what she will need to do if she backs-up the Paylocity and payment for Chris.

Voted: Approval of Razell being back-up to Chris, treasurer, for approval of timecards and payment needs.

Motion: Chris Winstead

Second: Grant Provost

Vote: All present in favor

Updates-Erin

- **WIOA Reauthorization:** Erin updated everyone on her last update from Senator Collins office regarding the reauthorization, and she was told that nothing would happen. After this the Senate and House came together for a bicameral proposal, and they're trying to pass it through. The 50% training requirement is still unchanged currently. Erin sent emails to Senator King and Collins as well as Representative Golden explaining what this would mean for Maine. Right now, community college is free, and the Maine Community College System received an additional \$75 million dollars which will enable many of their short-term workforce trainings to be offered free of charge. Maine has invested over \$12 million in its apprenticeship program, that touts "earn while you learn" opportunities. This impacts how we will be able to spend 50% on training. We will need to focus on people who need training, rather than on those just seeking to join the workforce. We will also need to focus on more high-cost training. The 50% training requirement also means staffing will likely be cut and fewer staff will need to work with more people. She found an article regarding Pell that stated 49% of Pell recipients completed their training within 8 years. In Maine's PY23 Annual WIOA Report, the credential rate for the Adult program was 65.85% and 80% for the Dislocated Worker program--well over the 49% of Pell completers. The difference between Pell and WIOA is WIOA participants have a workforce development specialist and support services to help them get across the finish line. The comparison of WIOA completers to Pell completers shows the power of that additional support, which will be greatly reduced with the 50% training mandate. Erin received an email this morning from Antionette stating that the department of government efficiency being put together by Trump, Musk and

Ramaswamy has a list of expired and expiring authorizations and is not planning to put money into those programs and one of them is WIOA. While very concerning, Erin doesn't feel this will happen as there is solid bipartisan support for employment training programs. She will keep everyone informed as she hears updates.

- **MDOL Monitoring:** Erin sent everyone the MDOL monitoring report and stated that we are doing very well. She mentioned the training that Loretta was referring to and how complex WIOA is and the things you must put into the Maine Job Link and how non-intuitive MJL is. The information that is entered into MJL determines how the region meets its performance measure goals. Besides performance measures, it monitors the effectiveness of case management: have you contacted the client every 30 days, have you reviewed the plan every 90 days, when an individual gets employment have you entered in where, when, wages, and benefits. All of this is very complicated and makes the training vital. Monitoring over the last several quarters has shown a drop in the number of concerns over files.
- **IFA Update:** Erin is still working on the IFA, which has hit a pause. The costs are being determined by square footage, but the Bureau of Rehabilitation requires that usage be taken into consideration. BRS will not sign off unless usage is included in the configuration.
- **Marketing Campaign/Transportation:** The campaign has driven 151 people to fill out the form on the landing page. 50 are youth (15-24), 76 are 25-54 year olds and 23 are 55+ with 2 age unknown. Erin asked EMDC to investigate how many of those have turned into enrollments because that is the end goal of at least 100 enrollments. The key is to respond immediately and how they are responding and what is the result of that outreach.
- **NSF Engines Grant:** The Space Consortium grant includes all 3 workforce boards and we're working together on a proposal as a workforce entity, Erin will focus on disconnected youth with other areas of focus by the other boards. The grant would mean over 50 million dollars over ten years, which would be significant. We need to add this to the local plan because a lot of things are happening with the space economy and could affect our region. Unfortunately, the footprint for the space complex for Maine doesn't include anything in our area, but Erin gave them clear ways of how we can be involved through the supply chain.
- **Tradeswomen Collective:** Erin was invited to the board meeting tomorrow night of this *Tradeswomen Collective* group in Rockland. Despite not getting the WANTO grant, she has been making connections to not only apply for the WANTO grant again, but to fulfill the Governor's executive order to get more women into the trades. She's talked with *Non-trad Tradies*, a group in southern Maine, which has more of a social focus. The *Tradeswomen Collective* are focused on getting women into the trades. She will attend the board meeting and an event on Sunday as well.
- **Industry Update in January:** Erin wanted to check in with Cathy that she is all set to present an industry update on the tourism industry at the January full board meeting. Cathy said she is all set to present this.

Open Discussion

Erin is worried about the WIOA reauthorization and is working to inform as many people as she can about it and the importance behind it. Razell agreed with Erin's concern, stating that it includes Veteran benefits which have already expired, and she finds it interesting when they mention their thoughts on programs they are cutting. She doesn't understand how they can have a law that hasn't been revoked

stating you must have this and then motion to take those programs and funding away. Erin said that congress passes laws that have money attached to it but never passes the budget for it. She said unless it's reauthorized the money goes asway. Grant added that sometimes when there is a law that gets passed but they don't want them to come to fruition they don't attach fiscal appropriations to them, they are "killed" at the appropriations stage making it a voided law. Erin mentioned the other piece that is included is that the state can take an additional 10% off the top in addition to the 15% they currently take. Erin and Sara will develop a potential future budget taking into account the 25% for the state, 10% for the board, and the remaining program dollars that reflect 50% for training. There will be very limited staff to help people, and we will need to institute Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) where the board works with companies to pay for the upskilling of current employees. The board can designate 20% of the adult and dislocated worker grants to fund IWT. The incumbent workers will not count toward our enrollment goals and there will be less money to focus on the unemployed or underemployed. Chris feels that because students are going in for free community college and they are still filling out all the paperwork to qualify for Pell and wrap around services, a discussion with Janet should take place to get in front of the financial aid folks and the admissions folks to get that paperwork qualified through WIOA because there are other services that they may qualify for and could get some of the training paid for to hit the numbers. He also feels a conversation around incumbent workers should happen to look into what's going on with the compact because we may be the ones able to provide match dollars for the businesses to access those funds and spend our funds down serving people. He would like to discuss it further with Erin to get more details on how he can assist in these areas. Erin mentioned that IWT does not count toward our enrollment goals, but it does allow us to spend money. Currently, spending the adult and dislocated worker funds is not a problem. Once we hear about the reauthorization, we will need to make changes and adjust as per the new requirements for PY25. People are afraid to get off assistance because of the benefit cliff and getting employment means paying money that they need for healthcare and bills when they lose the safety net due to their employment status. There are still people out there who need our assistance and services so it's important to keep up with what changes are coming and how we can continue to assist those who need us. Chris agrees that navigation supports, check-ins, and personal connections are vital in getting these people to success.

Razell mentioned that there used to be requirements in place to check-in with people going through the programs that provided individuals with all the training and supports they needed to fully succeed and stay connected with services to ensure that success happened. That was cut. She also mentioned that they recently got someone employed at a bank who has a family with 3 children, and he is now making \$75,000 annually but as they sat down and went through healthcare and other items he was amazed at how much of his pay would go to taxes and benefits and what he thought about insurance and benefits was very different from what he actually needed to expect.

Chris mentioned that Razell did a great job representing the state and region well during the webinar with workforce pathways and training. The webinar looked at what is and what can happen and how we are working together to make these programs successful.

Erin will send out emails to the Senators and Representatives as well as the list of programs that could be hit by the changes going through the new administration. She wants to make sure that everyone is aware of what to expect and what we need to be prepared for.

Adjourn

Laurie Glidden adjourned the meeting at 9:34am.

Next Operations Committee meeting: Wednesday, January 8, 2025, 8:30am-9:30am via ZOOM

Next Full Board meeting: Thursday, January 23, 2025, 8:30am-10:30am via ZOOM