



**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Operations Committee Minutes
February 12, 2025**

Approved by Operations
Committee:

March 12, 2025

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Razell Ward, Secretary; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member/Youth Committee Chair

Absent: Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Chris Winstead, Treasurer/Chair of Resources

Others Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Carrie Parker, Administrative Assistant; Sam Giasson, Youth Services Director, EMDC; Leah Culliver, Workforce Services Director, EMDC

Call to Order

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

Provider Updates-Sam

Erin welcomed Leah Gulliver who previously worked with EMDC and has recently returned as the Director of Workforce Services. Leah introduced herself to the committee and said in her previous role with EMDC, she served as the assistant director in the northeast region. After several years with Penobscot Community Health Center, she returned to take the leadership role across EMDC's nine counties. However, she is mainly focusing on supporting the central western region.

Enrollments:

<u>WIOA Title</u>	<u>Planned for PY24 3rd Qtr.</u>	<u>Actual (as of 2/10/25)</u>
Adult	148	158
Dis. Wkr.	55	46
Youth (In school)	22	14
Youth (Out of School)	65	69
QUEST	158	113

Since the last report out in early January, EMDC's enrollment numbers have continued to increase. We are off to a great start for the 3rd quarter.

EMDC has received 323 referrals over the past month. 52% of this total included My Maine Future form submissions; 25% were referrals from our BES partners. Two staff who have been designated to triage BES and My Maine Future inquiries continue to move forward in this process.

QUEST Grant:

We continue to work towards increasing QUEST enrollments and are at 71.52% of the total goal (113 out of 158). Spending down QUEST grant funds is currently a priority. EMDC's leadership team is working diligently with staff to identify opportunities to assist individuals enrolled in the QUEST program with additional support.

Employer Projects:

Spruce Mountain Adult Education **Currently** in progress. CMA training with classes and clinicals being done in conjunction with Franklin Memorial Hospital. Class dates are 11/5/24 – 03/14/25 with clinicals beginning 03/17/25. They will do 160 hours of clinical and then sit for the NHA exam. EMDC enrolled 6 students: 4 Adults, 1 OSY, and 1 QUEST.

Greater Lincoln Adult Education / Maine Health CNA program began 2/10/25. EMDC is supporting one customer who is enrolled in WIOA OSY.

Reed & Reed OJTs are in progress. Three participating, 2 QUEST and one OSY.

In Progress:

Lewiston Adult Education Today's Teller Training started 1/9/25. EMDC enrolled 7 students: 5 QUEST and 2 Adults.

Lewiston Adult Education Foundation/PSS/CNA Healthcare Pathway with Lewiston Adult Education; this is a registered apprenticeship training. A new Mod 3 (CNA) round started on 12/9/24; EMDC has 24 students; 18 Adults, 2 QUEST, and 2 Youth.

Skowhegan Adult Education CDL training started on 1/28/25. 8 students were referred, 2 were enrolled in the adult program; tuition was covered; however, supportive services are being provided.

Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education CDL training cohort began on 2/4/25. EMDC enrolled 8 participants: 2 QUEST, 2 OSY, 3 Adults, and 1 Dislocated Worker.

Completed:

Spruce Mountain Adult Education Culinary Arts training started on 10/1/24; this is a 16-week training. EMDC enrolled 2 Youth.

Skowhegan Adult Education CDL training started on 9/17/24. EMDC contacted 12 students and only 1, an Adult, opted to receive services; tuition was covered, and most did not feel they needed the supportive services.

Augusta Adult Education and Maine Veteran's Homes CNA training ended in January. EMDC enrolled 2 Youth (this is not a project for this round). Both passed the exam.

Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education CNA training started 10/7/2024 and ended in January. EMDC enrolled 1 student, and she passed the exam.

Upcoming:

EMDC is working with a variety of training providers across the region to engage job seekers in occupational skills training. Upcoming projects in the works include Lewiston Adult Education Trades/Construction; CNA training cohorts with region 9 Adult Education, Oxford Hills/Nezinscot Adult Education, and Augusta Adult Education; Westbrook Adult Education Industrial Sewing; Gray New Gloucester Adult Education CCMA; AFL-CIO Pre-Apprenticeship; Lewiston Adult Education will begin a new cohort for their Healthcare Pathways program; and Culinary Arts at Spruce Mountain Adult Education.

Other News:

Three new EMDC staff have started employment since the last report. Brianna Proctor and Jennette Holt started their roles as Workforce Development Specialists on February 3rd. While both will be working throughout the Central Western Maine region, Brianna will be primarily based out of the Lewiston Career Center, and Jennette's focus will be around the Kennebec/Somerset area. Leah Gulliver joined the team on February 10th as a Director of the Workforce and will begin her focus by assisting the CWM region.

Community Partners we met with:

- Auburn Public Library
- Various Adult Education Centers
- Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN)
- Jewish Community Alliance
- Maine Spark
- Vocational Rehabilitation staff
- Bureau of Employment staff
- YMCA of Auburn/Lewiston

Staff Training:

Career One-Stop for New Americans, Digital Literacy for Digital Skill Building, EMDC Workforce Trainings included: Workforce Reports Overview and Releases of Information. On the fourth Tuesday of each month, EMDC's weekly staff training will focus on business services and feature guest speakers. New staff training included Case Notes and Eligibility.

Businesses we met with: EMDC staff have been actively engaging with local businesses and employers to seek out work-based learning and employment opportunities for our participants. Outreach to businesses this month included: BC Heating, Plumbing and Hardware; Prostream Plumbing and Heating; Pup's Playground & Doggy Daycare; Hancock Lumber; Parent Lumber; Orion Lumber; Vera's Iron and Vine, and J.L. Fortin. Marianne Young attended a networking event at the Forks Area Chamber of Commerce where she connected with businesses in the Somerset County region.

The workforce team is in the process of planning several summer programming opportunities for youth throughout the Central Western Region. Potential partnerships are in the works with MYAN G2O, TRIO Upward Bound, AGC, South End Teen Center, and ELO programs in Oxford County.

EMDC staff met with the Auburn Public Library to discuss partnership with the library and the City of Auburn to host youth work experiences.

Laurie asked who is behind the industrial sewing training, Sam explained that this is a collaboration between the Lewiston Adult Ed and Westbrook Adult Ed programs. Erin stated that Threads, a company that was based in Portland, went out of business but gave their equipment to the Westbrook Adult Ed for training purposes. She stated that it is a bit expensive, but the need is there. Laurie confirmed that this will be industrial sewing. Sam stated that she and Marianne discussed looking at places like LL Bean for possible employment opportunities.

Erin asked Sam about the South End Youth Center work that EMDC is doing because when she went there before there were very few youth over the age of 14 at the center. Sam stated that there is a new Program Coordinator, Amy Morris, who they have a meeting with on February 24th via the point of contact from BES Kendra Wheelock, and that there are fewer youth attending the center now that are under 16 years old. She said that the average youth are 16-18 years. Erin mentioned that Sam should reach out to Vic Esposito for information on the youth program through the Alford Center since they will already be in the Waterville area. Sam said that the intention at this time is to pilot the South End program and then investigate Alford, but she will find out more at the February 24th meeting and update everyone at the next Operations Committee meeting.

Financial Update

Sara was unable to make the meeting, but Erin gave the committee an update on finances. Erin stated that at this time everything looks good with spending. They continue to watch PY23 funds but feel funds will be spent out by the end date of June 30th. She stated that the concerns around Quest spending with EMDC are being closely monitored and that she and Sara will meet with EMDC staff again next week to review it. If there are not good plans in place to spend down the funds, we will need to look at returning unused funds so that other regions may be able to utilize the money. Erin has been discussing upcoming programs with Marianne to see how many people may fall under Quest. She also met with Mahmood Omar from the Jewish Community Alliance and arranged to have some of his clients meet with EMDC staff to talk about services. On Friday, February 7, Mahmood brought 14 New Mainers that he's working with to the Lewiston Career Center, where Erin and EMDC staff Marianne and Heather, spoke to them, with the help of a language interpreter line, about services for employment. All had work authorizations and wanted to find employment. Several Columbians in the Rumford area were referred by Catholic Charities of Maine (CCM). EMDC staffer April also set up a meeting to meet with all of them, but no one showed up. She enrolled two and tried to communicate with the CCM contact, but there was no response from CCM. The CCM contact worked on her own getting them employed and Irving in Dixfield hired five. Potentially, these all could have been OJTs with funding support through QUEST of about \$42,000. She emailed CCM and included Tarlan and a few other people to say that we need to have better communication so

opportunities like this aren't missed going forward. She reached out to Billi Friday when she knew, but at that time it was too late. Marianne met with Irving to go over an OJT, so they could be ready to take advantage of it in the future.

Updates

- ❖ **WIOA funding:** Erin gave an overview of funding holds per the Executive Order from the President a few weeks ago that froze all kinds of federal funding, which would have affected WIOA. However, the courts did put an injunction in place stopping that order and releasing funds. Currently, we have not had any trouble receiving funding, which doesn't come as a lump sum at the beginning of the program year. A draw down method is used to disperse funds. So weekly or bi-weekly, providers, boards and MDOL submit requests to cover two weeks' worth of upcoming expenses. ETA then releases those funds. Some agencies like the National Institute of Health did have their funding frozen and they only received it after the injunction, but some agencies have had trouble getting their funding and being locked out of payment systems. This has not happened to us, but Erin is not sure if it will as this could be a lengthy process as it moves through the courts. The administration does value work, so she is hopeful that this will help us move forward. When she goes to the NAWB conference at the end of March with Cathy she is going to be staying behind for the Advocacy Day to participate in training around how to advocate. She will also be meeting with Maine's congressional delegation, as scheduled by NAWB. She is the only one from Maine who signed up for this portion of the event and feels sitting with Susan Collins, who is on the Appropriations Committee, it is important to ensure that we are being seen and heard directly.

- ❖ **IFA Update:**

Erin believes an agreement for the IFA on monies has been reached. She is sending it out to the non-residents because the money tier that she set up has been affected by incorrect numbers and the fact that BRS is requiring that usage be considered in the formula—not just square footage. With Sara's help, Erin made those adjustments and it brought up the costs for everyone. She eliminated usage tied to non-residents to lower those costs. She is sending that out today and will update everyone once she hears back. She is hoping that the reauthorization will eliminate the IFA and that the Career Center moves from Mollison Way as they've been thinking about doing.

- ❖ **Marketing Campaign/Transportation RFA:**

The marketing campaign is in full swing and currently there have been approximately 400 people who have sent in the form. Unfortunately turning those into enrollments has been challenging. Sam stated that at this time only 1 person has been enrolled in youth services from the marketing campaign. She will reach out to Alex to confirm this information as both she and Erin thought there was another youth enrollment prior to January. Erin stated that the challenge is not people going to the My Maine Future website and filling out the form, but rather those doing so are not all youth. Youth who are sending in forms are not converting into enrollments, and this is something that we continue to work with EMDC and the marketing team to resolve.

Razell asked about the comments that she has been seeing around the marketing campaign on social media that are not very flattering or may not be appropriate or on-topic and are these things that we can delete. Erin stated that we try to respond to the best of our ability to the comments and messages, and that there are times when we cannot like in a situation where a grandmother inquired about her granddaughter who is 27 years old so we cannot discuss anything with the grandmother. There was a concern around marketing issues on X that were brought up by someone who felt that the ad was targeting people with disabilities. Erin is having the marketing team investigate it and a look for a solution.

Part of the \$500,000 ARPA funds were designated for a transportation pilot, and it was agreed to do an RFA for that which Erin sent to everyone. She is waiting to hear from GoMaine and Angelina Klouthis Jean, who oversees ARPA funding, to see if we are all set to release the RFA. Josh Henry, Diane Frigon and Charlie Woodworth agreed to review the RFAs and make the final selection.

- ❖ **NSF Engines Grant:**

Erin received an email from Terry Shehata from the Maine Space Corporation stating that despite the federal funding freeze that is happening they still expected the grant due on February 11th and submitted it. As of right now they are not freezing the money and they will continue the process of looking at applications and awarding funds. However, it needed to be adjusted to remove anything to do with DEI. The trouble with this is that no one has been given clear indications of what that means, as DEI covers so many things. No one knows if this is targeting any one population like immigrants, people with disabilities, etc. We are waiting for Terry to let us know what he wants done and how to change things.

❖ **Operations Vice Chair:**

Erin stated that the Operations Committee must have a Vice Chair and that they need to represent business. She is asking everyone to think about possible nominees that she can reach out to about joining the committee. This is a safeguard as well for times when Cathy may not be available, and the committee needs someone who can step in and assist.

❖ **Quest Update:**

Erin once again stated that Sara, she and EMDC are looking at this very closely to ensure that the monies are spent on the end date for the contract. She will continue to keep the committee informed about it. She mentioned that the MDOL just hired someone to focus on Green Energy, which was one of the Quest grant areas of focus along with infrastructure and healthcare. She is looking forward to working with the new staff around Green Energy and the companies in our region that may be hiring. These companies could be targeted to use OJT funds through Quest.

❖ **Open Discussion/New Business:**

Erin had a good conversation with the Healthy Community Coalition in Franklin County and the intensive care manager, Cheryl Ratcliffe for the Franklin County jail was in attendance along with the deputy sheriff for the jail. She set up a meeting with the intensive care manager, Cheryl Rackliffe, to discuss how they could use WIOA funds to help people coming out of the Franklin jail. Cheryl invited Erin to a meeting with Options (a statewide agency focused on recovery and harm reduction), the pre-trial officers and parole officers on February 10. Erin invited Kim Morrison who's in charge of the jail diversion grant with EMDC. They had a good meeting and discussed how Quest can help with employment opportunities.

Cathy circled back to the messages and comments on the website and stated that she was approached once by a company who could set up a program to eliminate negative comments and post positive ones only, but she refused as she felt that it was unethical. She agrees that seeing posts that are not flattering is difficult, it is also normal to not please everyone and that these comments can be taken with a grain of salt and used to look at improvements. Erin agreed and stated that she is interested to see what Fuseideas has to say around the X platform issues and how that was brought to us by the user. She will share what she learns. Cathy said that she would think most people on social media sites understand that there are always going to be positive and negative comments, that some may come from disgruntled employees or customers, but that ethically you take the good with the bad and leave it.

There were not enough members present who attended the January meeting to approve the minutes from that meeting. Erin stated that she can send them out in an email to the members for voting approval, Razell motioned for them to be sent out with a request to second her motion of approval. Once the electronic voting is complete the electronic votes will be added to the Operation Committee minutes. Should there be any issues with approval Erin will reach out to all members to address the situation.

Adjourn

Cathy Witherspoon adjourned the meeting at 9:11am

Next Operations Committee meeting: Wednesday, March 12, 2025, 8:30am-9:30am via ZOOM

Next Full Board meeting: Thursday, April 24, 2025, 8:30am-10:30am via ZOOM