



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

Approved by Operations
Committee:

April 9, 2025

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

Absent: Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment

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

Call to Order

Cathy Witherspoon called the meeting to order at 8:37am.

Provider Updates-Leah

Leah mentioned that moving forward she will be presenting the provider update at the meetings and that EMDC staff like Sam or Loretta will join when they are needed for information sharing.

Enrollments:

<u>WIOA Title</u>	<u>Planned for PY24 3rd Qtr.</u>	<u>Actual (as of 3/11/25)</u>
Adult	148	168
Dis. Wkr.	55	47
Youth (In school)	22	14
Youth (Out of School)	65	76
QUEST	158	129

EMDC has received 337 referrals over the past month. 62% of this total included My Maine Future form submissions; 14% were referrals from our BES partners. Erin mentioned that it may be helpful to have a meeting and see what steps should be taken to maintain youth interest moving forward since we know how hard it is to engage youth and at this time, we have them excited and responding to the campaign. This would be the ideal time to ensure that we keep them engaged and get them excited enough to spread the word to other young people around them.

Erin also mentioned that it is important to remember that youth enrollment is much more of a process than adult enrollment. She went on to explain that there are 4 steps in the youth enrollment process that include registration, subjective assessment, writing a plan and then an objective assessment. It is this extensive process that adds time to enrolling youth versus adults into services.

Cathy asked if EMDC is also trying to enroll adults to which Leah stated that they are looking to enroll anyone eligible for services despite their age. Leah stated that the goal is to get people enrolled into whichever program will be successful for them and to assist them on their pathway or refer them to partnering programs where they will find success. Cathy asked Leah for information showing the difference between completed enrollments and Leah stated that she would get that information to the committee as she did not have it at the time.

My Maine Futures Campaign Results to date:

EMDC has received a total of 772 forms as of 3-10-2025

- 679 for CWM

- 13 for Northeast
- 80 are from outside EMDC's coverage area
- Enrollments: 7 registrations since the campaign started; 4 adults, 1 Quest, 1 Youth-ISY, and 1 Youth-OSY
- County/Age breakdown of specifically the 679 CWM submission forms:

Androscoggin County: 241 Forms

Kennebec County: 204 Forms

Franklin County: 51 Forms

Somerset County: 88 Forms

Oxford County: 95 Forms

Ages 24 and Below: 289 Forms

Ages 25-54: 269 Forms

Ages 55+: 79 Forms

Unknown Ages: 15 Forms

Laurie asked if there was any way to streamline the data around enrollment to get a clearer idea of where those people who have reached out for services are in the enrollment process and if potential clients are dropping out at what point. She feels that having a clearer picture of the numbers from start to finish will also help with what areas can be improved upon. Chris mentioned maybe creating a dashboard with the data that would make it easy to understand and can be updated for future meetings. Leah felt both of these were valuable ideas and she will bring them to the EMDC team and follow up at the next Operations Committee meeting in April.

QUEST Grant:

To date we are at 81% of the total enrolled goal (129 out of 158). We expect to see additional spending as reporting catches up with current projects/cohorts underway, OJT agreements are invoiced and paid, and additional supportive services are provided. We are closely monitoring this program.

Erin mentioned that in the quarter far, from January 1st to March 11th, there were 21 referrals and to reach goals EMDC must enroll 19 people every quarter. Since the grant began in 2022 that goal was reached only once, and it was in the fourth quarter with 23 people enrolled. At this time, she feels that EMDC will make the goal of 19 enrollments and may even pass the 2022 marker of 23.

Employer Projects:

In progress:

Oxford Hills CDL began 2/4, 8 enrolled

Greater Lincoln Adult Ed began 2/10, 1 enrolled

Region 9 C.N.A began 2/25, 5 enrolled

Lewiston Adult Ed Trades Construction began 2/27, 4 enrolled

Oxford Hills C.N.A began 3/3, 3 enrolled

Westbrook Adult Ed, Industrial Sewing began 3/4, 4 enrolled

Planned:

Grey New Gloucester CCMA, start date 3/17, 9 referred – 3 registered to date

AFL-CIO Portland, Pre-Apprenticeship, start date 3/31, 4 referred

Lewiston Adult Ed Healthcare Pathway, start date TBD (March), course open to 20 people

Spruce Mountain Culinary Arts, start date TBD (March), course open to 3-4 people

Skowhegan Adult Ed, C.N.A, start date 4/15, course open to 8 people

AFL-CIO Lewiston Pre-Apprenticeship, starting date 6/15, open to 6-8 people.

Other News: The following represents a snapshot of work we are doing in the community and internally to connect with partners, employers and job seekers.

Community Partners we met with:

- Travis Collins House
- Maine Health Outpatient Therapy
- Coding Clarified
- South End Teen Center
- FedCap
- Various Adult Education Centers
- Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN)
- Jewish Community Alliance
- Maine Spark
- Vocational Rehabilitation staff
- Bureau of Employment staff

Staff Training: Regular weekly training topics included: Release of Information training, Confidentiality, Ethics and Boundaries, Federal and State Policy Refresher, Apprenticeships. We also hosted a comprehensive staff retreat on March 7th to bring colleagues together for collaboration and training with a focus on managing referrals, and case management methods to identify pathways and program services to boost the chances of customer success.

Upcoming Events: Somerset Career & Tech Center Career Fair, KVCC Career Fair, Cony High School Aspirations Day, Alford Youth & Community Center Job & Volunteer Fair

Cathy asked if the 772 recorded from the campaign forms is a lot to which Erin stated that though the numbers are impressive, the goal of reaching 1,000 enrolled from the campaign will not be met.

Financial Update-Sara

Sara stated that with the possible government shutdown she has been working feverishly trying to accrue for any expenses that we can legitimately accrue through the end of March so that drawdowns can be submitted by noon today for both CWMWDB and the Northeast Board.

Looking at the administrative budget through the end of February, which is 2/3 the way through the budget Sara stated that spending in total is at 57.6%. If the community-based organization mini grants and the marketing campaign are removed, we are at 61.5%, which is perfect. She again stated that she likes to be just at or slightly below where we should be through this time of year. The focus at this time is not on our spending, but EMDC spending with the Career contract ending next week and the final drawdowns being requested, which means that money is all spent out.

Sara will focus on the ARPA grant after the PY23 funds until they are spent out. At this time EMDC is still working on spending out those funds before they can begin spending on the PY24 funding, which we have already begun spending out. Through the end of March, the last drawdown submitted showed they spent 1.4 million of their 1.8 million, so they have \$433,894 remaining and only 3 ½ months left to spend it before the contract expires. This means that they must spend \$124,000 a month and they submit drawdowns every 2 weeks so each drawdown will need to be about \$57,000. The good news is that on average they are spending about that amount, but she will continue to monitor it with Erin. Erin stated that she will get Sara the email regarding an extension on the ARPA contract through the end of September 2026.

Sara stated that Quest expires at the end of September and at this time EMDC has spent \$667,000 of their 1.2 million budget, which is only 55% and so she is working with them on spending that out as well. They're going must spend \$83,000 per month or 38,000 every 2 weeks in order to spend that out. Erin also stated that one of the reasons getting the IFA signed and invoices sent out is that some of that money will be spent on utilities, technology and rent.

Sara informed everyone that for the past 48 hours she has been focusing and preparing for this shutdown, which hopefully won't happen. And the second thing is the monitoring of us by the state which they've contracted out to a consulting firm called E. Bailey and that is very time-consuming and an in-depth process.

Updates-Erin

- **WIOA Reauthorization:** The 1st House Committee meeting was held on March 5th and the NAWB sent an encapsulated email breaking down who spoke and what they said. Erin feels it is going to be the same as the “Strong Workforce for America Plan” that the House approved in March of 2024. This is problematic for many reasons which Erin has shared previously and has also shared with the Congressional people. The larger concern is what will happen on Friday with the possible shutdown. Erin explained that they are trying to pass a budget that was approved by the House yesterday and is now going to the Senate. Erin discussed the shutdown with Sara as the way the funds work is that we do not get a check for 5million dollars, but every two weeks we request drawdowns that are sent to the state, this is gathered with everyone else’s add ons and sent to the government. The money can then be held for 72 hours, which means once we get the funds, we are required to pay all the people we said were getting paid within that time frame. There are boards asking for money to get through the end of May, however, this is not legal and so we are not doing that. So at this time if the shutdown happens there is enough money to pay both Erin and Carrie for 2 paychecks, through April 2nd, this brings a lot of questions that at this time have no answers, to include health insurance for Erin as there aren’t extra funds to keep things moving forward for both CWMWDB and EMDC as well as many other partnering programs. If the resolution passes there will be funding, but the reauthorization is still a concern, so Erin is waiting to see how things progress and will keep everyone informed as there are updates.
- **IFA:** There are 2 signatures left, and both are on board with their tier level so once those signatures come back the invoices for payment can be sent out to residents by Lisa Haskell and to non-residents by Sara. The process will start again in April for the 2025-2026 year, and this one will be tricky due to the footprint reduction taking place at the Lewiston Career Center. The renegotiation didn’t work out very well and they were looking elsewhere for space but that also turned no leads on anything large enough to house all needs. Erin doesn’t see as much of a reduction as they should because the building is being remodeled and that’s going to cost the residents. The other issue is the information center which the non-residents must chip in costs for which will be dramatically reduced, giving them a good cost reduction. The remodel should be finished by the end of the year, which will give at least a 6-month cost change.
- **Marketing Campaign/Transportation RFA:** The transportation RFA has been sent out and is on the CWMWDB website. The state sent it out and Erin wrote a press release that was also sent out far and wide, she got an email from Kim Lindloff at the Mid Maine Chamber and the Maine Economic Growth Council who sent it out to all of her people in the newsletter on Monday. Kelly Flagg with AGC sent it out in the weekly newsletter, so we are getting coverage on it from the Cogs and cohorts/partners that will garner interest and will get us some applications and will be able to spend the ARPA funding as \$210,000 is dedicated to the Transportation grant.
- **NAWB Conference:** Cathy and Erin will be attending the NAWB conference in May with Laurie joining them at the tail end for Advocacy Day. It is going to be very important and interesting conversationally about what’s happening and what is to come in the future. There is always a full-time staff member on the hill to update a power up policy and whatever else arises once a month. Erin sent along some information that was emailed from NAWB on March 4th when the House Education and Workforce Committee met, and a synopsis was sent out. Erin forwarded it along to Angus Kings representative in Bangor, Edie Smith to ensure that people know what is being said. The Advocacy Day will have training and the chance to meet with representatives on the hill after the conference. Edie has already said that Erin and Laurie will have time to meet with Angus King, and she is hoping to speak with Susan Collins and Jared Golden or their staff as well.
- **Operations Vice Chair:** Erin stated again that the Operations Committee needs a Vice Chair that represents a business. She will send the board make-up list to everyone with those board members who are most active like Billi Mitchell or Chris Waite, and would represent business to get suggestions for the position.

- **Quest:** We were asked by the Program Manager of Quest at MDOL to send in a report of what funds were obligated and what was unobligated for them to see how much money do we have around and is there a certain area that can't use it can it be sent along to another area to be used so that we don't have money being sent back at the end of the contract date. Erin reached out to Tom and asked them for 3 categories of where funds are being spent through September 30th that show what is indirect like rent, utilities, etc. and what are salaries, fringe benefits. Though staff may be hired or leave and that will disrupt the numbers, they will basically show the right information. She also got information around travel and other payments that are paid out over time and then things that are in the works like with the Healthcare Pathways with Razell that attracts a lot of New Mainers, and would they be eligible for QUEST and what those costs look like. Could there be potential for support and for how many people? Erin took all this data and created a report that she shared onscreen and will also send out to everyone for review. This breakdown gives a great example of where the monies are going and how they can be used with partners for things like training. She gave a brief description of how the networking process works with a discussion she had with Lisa Hartnett and Kaitlyn Bennett during lunch at Legends in Lewiston. They met the owner and began talking about services, through this conversation they were able to set up 2 OJTs at the restaurant which will be worth \$19,500. Erin will meet with EMDC staff monthly to continue collecting data and ensure that spending stays on track.

New Business/Open Discussion

Cathy mentioned the benefits from the lunch that Erin had at Legends that turned out the OJTs and Erin stated that through talking about opportunities and services all the time it is a great way to gain interest and make connections. Bella Point, who is part of an Assisted Living in Fryeburg, but has sites across Maine reached out to Erin and they were able to discuss her hiring struggles and how her husband found information about CWMCWD. Erin is working on getting her connected with WIOA partners and services to assist. Erin stated that the toughest part is connecting, with everyone often focused on their own work needs, it is hard for anyone to think outside their own areas and look at the partnering services available to them. She explained an example of this was when board member Billi Mitchell and Irving were looking to do an OJT with New Mainers and worked with Catholic Charities were not responsive, so they ended up doing the work alone. This was a huge opportunity lost to us because they didn't think to reach out to us for assistance. Another example she mentioned was with Jordan, the staff at Mt. Blue who runs the pre-apprenticeship program, and we could easily put somebody through their pre apprenticeship program and do an apprenticeship with Sugarloaf, we could do an OJT, however long, we can't do a past 6 months and contract subsidizing 50%. The important thing she mentioned is to ensure that we are always checking in and seeing how we can assist each other in various ways.

Adjourn

Cathy Witherspoon adjourned the meeting at 9:11am

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

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