



**Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting**

January 22, 2026

Board approved during April 24, 2026, quarterly meeting

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chair; Sue LeClair; Diane Frigon; Charlie Woodworth; Brandi Farrington; Bobbi Avery; Razell Ward, Secretary; Kelly Aho; Billi Mitchell; Dick Kropp; Laura Columbia; Patricia Rumsey; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Chris Waite; Casey Maloney; Tom Stevens; Erica Watson

Board Members Absent: Sam Hight; Adam Wilson

Staff Present: Erin Benson, Executive Director; Sara McLaughlin, Financial Manager

Others Present: Tom Fernands, EMDC; Heather Price, EMDC; Shannon Fair, MDOL; Joe Pietroski, Kennebec County Commissioner

Cathy opened the meeting at 8:32 am.

Welcome and Introductions:

Laurie Glidden retired from the board on December 31, but was asked to attend the January meeting so the board could acknowledge her service. Cathy thanked her for her time on the board and Operations Committee, noting her commitment to the work and her engagement and friendliness toward her board colleagues. Erin thanked Laurie for her dedication to being present, offering ideas, and chairing the youth committee. Kelly, who had served for several years with Laurie, also thanked her, and said that it was wonderful to work with her. Others chimed in their thanks. Laurie said she was eager to join the board as the programs were particularly helpful to her clients in the Family Self Sufficiency program at MaineHousing. While she was grateful to engage with the important work of this board, it was time for her to retire.

Cathy went on to welcome four new board members:

Laura Columbia, Superintendent of Schools, MSAD #58 (Strong, Kingfield, Avon, and Phillips)

Tom Stevens, Director of Training for Bath Iron Works

Richard Kropp, Chief People Officer for Central Maine Healthcare

Erica Watson, Senior Program Director for Education & Workforce for MDF

Each introduced themselves, and the current members introduced themselves.

VOTED: To approve October 23, 2025, meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Patricia Rumsey

Second: Kelly Aho

Vote: All in Favor

Service Provider Report

Heather Price mentioned that EMDC was ahead of its enrollment goals for adult, slightly behind for dislocated worker, and slightly ahead of goal for youth. EMDC has been working with its adult ed partners and others to build training cohorts for needed occupations in the region. Several are in

process while others are being planned. As Heater looked for additional information, Erin explained that EMDC has quarterly goals as well as a total goal. She pointed out the EMDC's total goal for the entire program year is 188. As of December 31, the end of the second quarter, EMDC had enrolled 284 people. So EMDC is not only ahead of its second quarter goal but has significantly passed its total program year goal with 5 months remaining. EMDC is very close to surpassing the year end goal for youth and they did surpass the second quarter goal for dislocated worker. Heather said they are continuing to see high referral numbers, mostly coming from the Career Centers, but some from other partners and community organizations. EMDC is always looking to connect with organizations to share information about ways to help job seekers and businesses.

As for success stories, a woman started by seeking HR Certification through a series of trainings from Visible Edge, which she completed in record time. She was hired as an HR Manager before she finished her testing.

EMDC struggled to enroll an adult seeking support, as life circumstances kept delaying the process. It took time to develop a pathway, as legal barriers prevented her from obtaining certain employment. She is still working with EMDC and a VR counselor to determine the best path. But the fact that she is now enrolled, communicative, and moving forward represents a win. It is one example of the participants with many barriers that take more time to find a path to employment.

An individual who is working with EMDC through its justice-involvement grant faced several barriers to his chosen employment path including housing, transportation, clothing, and tools. EMDC helped him with transportation from Augusta to Lewiston so he could begin work. They also provided funds for clothing and tools necessary for the job, as well as temporary housing. He began working on January 5 and is now housed and on the road to self-sufficiency.

Finally, EMDC supported a young woman through the youth program in CDL training, providing a laptop, mileage reimbursement, and cost of tuition. She passed her driving test on the first attempt, and now her WDS is helping her with job placement. Erin mentioned that CDL training is very expensive, so it could be a game changer to cover that cost for people interested in that line of work.

Response to Monitoring

Erin explained that the feds monitor the state, and the state monitors the board, and the board monitors the service provider. In monitoring the state, USDOL cited MDOL for a lack of financial monitoring of the board. This is supposed to happen yearly, and it has not happened in four years. The state hired Eide Bailey to undertake the task. They required hundreds of documents that proved to be a hardship for an organization that contracts with Sara for only 15 hours a week for financial management. We received a report from the state and were required to provide an official response by December 19, which we provided. Erin sent a copy of this response to the board, refuting their determination that we owed close to \$8,000. We have yet to receive a response.

Financial Update: PY25 budget

Sara shared the program budget, which contains a list of all the contracts CWM has open or were open during this fiscal year, and where we are in relation to expenditures. Most are multi-year contracts spanning 2 or more years. They start and stop at different times. At the last board meeting, CWM was just closing the QUEST grant. All the money was spent prior to the close of the grant. Next is the ARPA

grant which the board is managing internally, both administrative and programming. CWM has contracted with several organizations in the transportation portion of ARPA to purchase vehicles and other modes of transportation to help people get and/or retain employment. The total grant is \$500,000, of which \$50,000 is for admin and the rest for programming. As of January 22, CWM has spent \$369,000, which represents 74% of the contract. The grant ends September 30, 2026, and Erin is actively managing the plan so all dollars will be spent on time according to the plan. Then there are the WIOA contracts (PY24 and PY25) and there are typically two going on at the same time because they are two-year contracts. Each contract has three pots of money for the three funding streams: Adult, Dislocated Worker (DW), and Youth. Sometimes a service provider will spend one pot of money before the others. They could spend all the PY24 youth funds before spending out the PY24 Adult and DW funds. So, they would begin spending the PY25 Youth funds, but still use PY24 funds for Adult and DW. Sara explained that while those three funds come together to make up the administrative portion of the budget, the board does not view the funds separately as it does not engage in direct service with participants. So, when Erin charges time to WIOA, it does not differentiate between the three pots as it is all the same on the board level. Sara mentioned that this was another point of confusion in the monitoring done by Eide Bailey. On the PY24 contract, CWM has spent 93% of the administrative funds and 90% of the program funds. No reason it will not be spent out by June. On the admin side, CWM will not begin spending PY25 funds until PY24 has been spent. However, EMDC has already begun spending PY25 funds in the Youth category. Sara offered to answer any questions. With none asked, she moved on to the administrative budget.

Sara shared the administrative budget spreadsheet with the four same contracts at the top, showing how much of each contract helped fund the PY25 budget. It considers what has been spent in prior fiscal years as well as what is being reserved for future fiscal years. For example, ARPA doesn't end until September 30, 2026, which is three months into the next fiscal year. There is flexibility to move more money into the budget to pay for unexpected costs or save more for the next fiscal year because costs were less than expected. If this year goes according to plan, we will have \$112,000 to move to the next fiscal year, plus the PY26 funds. If it is the same as last year, we have about \$163,000 to add to the budget, so about \$275,000 for next year. If the budget for this year is \$500,000, it looks like we won't have enough for next year. However, it is important to note that CWM is managing those ARPA program funds, which really skew things. If Sara removes the ARPA program funds, the budget this year is actually \$264,000.

On the budget this year, through the end of December, 61% of the funds have been spent. It looks like we are ahead of spending, but when you remove the contractual ARAP funds, 40% of the budget has been spent. This is exactly where Sara likes to be—slightly under budget. Both Cathy and Razell complimented Sara on her effective and thorough presentation of the numbers.

Board membership/Leadership (Chair/Vice Chair/Youth Committee Chair)

Cathy Winterspoon explained that the board has been looking for a vice chair for quite some time, and the board must find a chair, as well. Cathy had been planning to step down on June 30, 2026. She also mentioned the need for a chair of the Youth committee since Laurie's retirement. So Erin will be looking for people to fill those positions. Cathy said that Erin might contact board members to gauge interest, or if board members are interested, let her know. While Cathy feels passionate about the work, her

husband has been retired for 7 years, and they will be traveling more, which might mean missing meetings. Erin shared a spreadsheet of board membership. Erin reminded the board that membership composition is dictated by the WIOA law: 51% must come from business, 20% from workforce/labor, and five required partners. Others can be added. CWMWDB By-Laws state that the board must have between 21-24 members. Some members have been moved to different categories. Billi Mitchell used to represent Irving in the business area. She has since started working for the University of Farmington, so now she will represent the higher ed required partner. Chris Winstead has been playing a dual role representing both workforce and higher ed. Now he will represent only workforce. Brandi Farington, who used to represent workforce, will now be representing the business sector, as Kennebec Behavioral Health is a business. And Erica Watson will represent workforce due to her workforce role with MDF. Adam Wilson was representing unions in the workforce area, but he has missed so many meetings. The By-Laws state that if you miss 3 meetings in a row, the Board will consider that a resignation. Grant and Erin will look for another union rep. Sam Hight has only attended 1 meeting, so we need to view that as a resignation. Erin spoke to Lisa Madore, the relatively new HR director for Timber HP, and she is very interested in being on the board. She asked to be called in a few months. With her addition, and a union rep, CWM will have a full board. But leadership must be addressed. Both the chair and vice chair roles must come from the business side. To become a vice chair now and be willing to move into the chair role, would be ideal. As chair and vice chair, in addition to the quarterly board meetings, those roles would also need to attend monthly Operations Committee meetings. Chris mentioned that in essence, CWM would be looking for two vice chairs, one to step into the chair role, and one to fill that role when the first steps into the chair role. Erin agreed. Chris shared his experience of serving on the Operations Committee for several years. He finds them informative and they move quickly. He feels that serving in these executive roles is not a huge lift. He asked that people strongly consider it. Cathy agreed. Being present and having an interest is key. She did not have experience in board leadership prior to taking the position with CWM. She said any business member would be capable. Dick Kropp volunteered to step in as vice chair. In a previous position in Massachusetts, he served as chair on a workforce board. Cathy thanked him for his willingness. Kelly Aho stated that Sara and Erin make it very easy, which was not always her experience serving in the past as interim chair. Razell asked again which leadership positions needed to be filled, and Cathy stated chair of the board and chair of the youth committee.

Local Plan RFP

Every four years, WIOA requires that boards develop a local plan to look at the opportunities and challenges in the region in terms of workforce as it relates to businesses and job seekers, and the most effective ways the board can address issues. The plan is due June 30. At the previous meeting in October, Erin stated she would write an RFP. Any RFP must be approved by the MDOL, so Erin sent it to Ginny Carroll. In reviewing it, Ginny asked about the board's procurement policy, as it may not require an RFP, which can be a lengthy process. The policy stated that purchases under \$25,000 only needed two oral quotes. The budget for the work is \$20,000, so Erin changed the process from an RFP to a Letter of Interest, using the guidelines developed for the RFP. Erin sent it to the local development districts (KVCOG & AVCOG), EMDC and Shanna Cox from the Lewiston Chamber who had expressed an interest as she had developed several. AVCOG responded immediately saying they did not have the staffing to undertake the project. KVCOG and EMDC expressed interest. The due date for a response to

the letter was January 9. KVCOG and Shanna did not respond. EMDC submitted its letter by the required date with a projected budget of just under \$20,000. However, that left us with only 1 quote. Erin contacted Camoine & Associates, a company that has done several workforce informed plans in the state. Their quote was between \$75,000 and \$115,000. EMDC was the only one who responded to the letter that came in under budget. EMDC wrote our last plan in 2022, they wrote the NWDB plan last year and received high praise from MDOL, and they have experience writing CEDS plans. Normally there would be a committee to review submissions and make a recommendation to the board for a vote. But there is only one submission, so the board will contract EMDC. Jaida Bolstridge will be the point person, and Tom Fernands will gather all the necessary information data. Erin will meet with them next week. As part of the plan, there will be focus groups and Erin may reach out to board members to attend. Kelly Aho offered to help in any way she could.

VOTED: To approve the selection of EMDC to write the Board's Local Plan.

Motion: Razell Ward

Second: Dick Kropp

Vote: All in Favor

Executive Director's Report:

Erin mentioned at the October meeting that MDOC had applied for the *Fair Chance to Advance* (FC2A) grant overseen by Jobs for the Future (JFF). Former director of the Maine Reentry Network, Bruce Noddin, who is now working for MDOC, asked Erin if she would be willing to serve on the steering committee if the state received the grant. Erin agreed to help with the two-year planning grant. A part of that is attending 4 national convenings for the grant awardees. It reflects the great work that Maine is doing in Corrections under the leadership of Commissioner Liberty. All costs are covered by the grant. Maine did receive the grant, 1 of 4 state awardees among the 38 that applied. The other three states include North Carolina, Kansas, and Oregon. This initiative will help states expand high-quality postsecondary education and workforce pathways for individuals with histories of incarceration. This is important work, first as it prevents recidivism, but also because the formerly incarcerated population could be a significant solution to our workforce shortage. Even though there are no correctional facilities in the CWM region, there are jails and those residents must have the same opportunities. Kennebec County Commissioner mentioned that he receives a report stating how much the county uses the workforce programs—and it is growing. Counties are a valuable source of employees. Unfortunately, the people in jails are staying longer, not just the typical 9 months or less. Some are staying up to 2 years. It is a captured audience that are signing up in higher numbers for programs offered in the jails. He stated he was very excited about these opportunities.

Some board members may be hearing about layoffs in the business community. Maine CPL in Lewiston, that makes donuts for several Dunkin Donuts chain stores, laid off 61 people. But it also affected the drivers who were transporting the product. Also Pride Manufacturing in Burnham will close in April, laying off 115 people. Burnham is not in the CWM region, however, many of the workers are from Pittsfield which is in the region. Erin asked Sue LeClair to explain the support that MDOL has for people who lose their jobs. MDOL has a Rapid Response team. As soon as they hear of a pending layoff, the employer is contacted to discuss services. Some employers choose to work with MDOL, some do not. And some businesses close overnight with employees showing up the next day to locked doors. When

an employer, like Pride, chooses to work with MDOL, employees are informed of all the services to help them transition. In the case of Pride, Sue and a colleague met with employees the next day explaining what could be available for them. Often, a team goes in from Career Centers, Workforce Providers, and Unemployment Insurance to go over all these options including health insurance. This more in-depth process will happen with Pride as the layoff date gets closer. They will plan a hiring event where other businesses looking for employees can recruit on site. There will be resume building sessions at the Career Center in Hinckley, so resumes are ready for the hiring event. Whether it's a company laying off 1 individual or 100, they are offered the same level of service. Tom Stevens of BIW asked how he could help. Sue said they would get BIW on the list for the potential to hire those laid off.

MDOL is working on another National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) that will likely focus on healthcare. Maine has received NDWG grants in the past including the Opioid and Quests grants. It will be a state-wide grant, which gives us a greater chance of succeeding. While large is geographic terms, Maine has a small population. There are more people in LA County than in the whole state of Maine. Board executives are meeting with the state next week, and Erin will update the board as things progress.

Finally, Erin elaborated on what Sara mentioned with ARPA funds. This was a grant that came to the board from the state, but the funds were part of the ARPA grant from the feds. Each of the three boards were eligible for a \$500,000 award, but CWMWDB chose a different path than the other two boards, who contracted with their providers to use the money to pay stipends for people in training. Erin designed a program based on what the board said was of interest to them. Funds went to: a marketing campaign focused on youth; an assessment designed to understand someone's behavioral characteristics and how they align with occupations; additional money to the \$54,000 QUEST funds for partnering with community-based organizations for outreach; and grants to businesses and/or organizations to help solve transportation issues. While the board kept \$50,000 for administration purposes, the remaining \$450,000 was contracted out to different companies/organizations. Much of that contracted money has been spent. The MDOL was concerned, so Erin did a spreadsheet for them so they could see how and when it would be spent. All of it will be spent before the close of the grant on September 30, 2026.

Cathy adjourned the meeting at 9:51 am.

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday, April 23, 2026, via Zoom