



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

October 23, 2025

Board approved during January 22, 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; Kelly Aho; Monique Roy; Laurie Glidden, At-Large Member/Youth Chair; Patricia Rumsey

Board Members Absent: Sam Hight; Adam Wilson; Kate Durkin; Grant Provost, Chair of Recruitment; Chris Winstead, Treasurer & Chair of Resources; Chris Waite

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

Others Present: Carrie Dwelley, EMDC; Tom Fernands, EMDC; Heather Price, EMDC; Deanna Patridge, MDOL;

Welcome and Introductions:

Cathy opened the meeting at 8:35am

VOTED: To approve July 24, 2025, meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Razell Ward

Second: Patricia Rumsey

Vote: All in Favor

Everyone took a few moments to provide introductions.

Financial Update: PY24 budget

Sara shared her screen so attendees could see budget spreadsheets. The overview looks at all contracts and the periods they span, and which ones are being used to fund the fiscal operating budget of PY25 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026). This budget was proposed and approved during the July meeting, and Sara compares the actuals to the proposed. Next, she reviews overall spending, not just the board but the service provider (program) as well; and not just the current year but all contracts to review how each one is spent out. Currently CWMWDB has four contracts including QUEST, which just ended September 30. Sara said it was quite a feat to spend that out in time. Six months ago, Sara and Erin began meeting with EMDC to review spending patterns, as spending was not keeping pace with the timeline of the contract. It looked like we might have to return money. Sara was pleased to state that all funds were spent by the deadline. Next, the ARPA grant or workers fund began in 2023 and will last through September 30, 2026. The board is managing the program funds internally—no funds are going to EMDC. Spent a little less than half and have a year to spend the rest. Sara has no concern that it will be spent. Erin will address this during her report. The last two are the formula funds, PY24 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2026) and PY25 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2027). Generally, you spend the older contract first, but that can vary. Each contract represents three programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth, each with its own budget. It could be that all the youth money was spent in one year but there is still adult and dislocated

worker funds available. We would continue to spend adult and DW funds from the older contract and start spending youth from the newer contract. At this point both administration and program dollars are on par to be spent by the appropriate time. Back to the overview of four contracts and the administrative budget, Sara explained that each contract was divided into admin and program funds and how much of those funds will go into the administrative budget for PY25, and how much will be held over for next year's budget. The approved budget is \$510,000. It sounds like double the typical yearly budget. This amount includes the program dollars from the ARPA grant which we are administering internally. Remove this amount and the budget is about \$270,000. The majority is spent on personnel as seen in salary, benefits, and fiscal management. We are ¼ of the way through the year and we are at 24% of spending, which is where it should be. Individual line items that look high are a reflection of up-front costs, i.e. insurance. The overview is laid out intentionally to see not only this year, but what lays ahead for next year. We estimate we will carry over some WIOA and ARPA funds. Based on projections, we will likely have \$286,000 for next program year's administrative expenses. We don't know what future allotments will be, but year over year, they are somewhat similar. However, we are on a downward trend.

VOTED: To approve budget presentation.

Motion: Razell Ward

Second: Kelly Aho

Vote: All in Favor

Service Provider Report-EMDC-Tom Fernand and Carrie Dwelley

Tom and Carrie mentioned Heather Price has a new role with EMDC. She is the regional manager in the Central Western region. Quest was a push, but all funding was spent. It was true teamwork between the board and the EMDC staff. In the quarterly review, a success story features a young man associated with a longtime partner, the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES) in Farmington. The young man, still in high school, came to EMDC with an interest in technology—potentially a career path in the field. He attended the Young Mainers Workforce Program. He began a work experience with CES with exposure to other entrepreneurs and technology such as 3-D printers. He applied and was accepted to Southern Maine Community College to study New Media. Heather mentioned two other success stories. Someone initially enrolled in Quest but became co-enrolled in Dislocated Worker when Quest's finding expired. He had a longtime history of working in factories. He was a jack of all trades but a master of none—no certifications to confirm his skill level. He found while looking for work that he needed those certifications along with his experience. He attended an electrician technology journeyman training at CMCC. EMDC paid for a laptop needed for classwork. He completed the training, which was a success in itself as he struggled with technology. Another gentleman was registered as an adult. He worked as a flagger, which is temporary in nature. He was seeking full-time work at a higher pay rate. He wanted to earn a CDL-A license, and EMDC supported him in this training. He completed the training and passed the written and driving tests on his first try. He has obtained work with one of the companies he met while flagging. Tom gave a quick update on PY25 Quarter 1 (July 1, 2025-September 30, 2025). For the Adult program, Q1 goal is 117; actual enrollment is 185, almost at end of year goal for adult enrollment, which is 188. There are still three more quarters remaining. Four of five performance measures are above goal, with only measurable skills gains lacking. The latter is the only real-time performance measure. It measures incremental steps toward your credentials. There are two "hot quarters" due to

when people start school. These numbers climb 2nd and 4th quarters. Dislocated Workers exceeded the goal for the quarter. Same scenario for the performance measures—everything above goal except for measurable skills gains. As for Youth, carry-in numbers were very high this year. It is difficult to know exactly how many participants will carry into the next program year. Tom said central western staff are getting better at identifying those people. Tom said EMDC has returned to a previous model of computing—asking staff to identify carry ins—and it has been far more effective. Youth enrollment is 120% of quarter goal. QUEST in its final quarter reached 149.7% of its overall goal. Employment information will continue to come in. EMDC was able to spend more money on participants with WIOA, QUEST, and ARPA funding. QUEST and ARPA are going away, so in the future there will be fewer funds to use. Erin mentioned that the QUEST grant, a National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG), was very similar to an NDWG grant the state received a few years ago—the OPIOID grant. For the latter, the CWM region had the same enrollment goal—158. We did not reach the goal and ended up sending back money. And the CWM area had sent back youth funds a few times in the past. The board’s goal is to ensure that goals are met and no money is ever sent back. As Sara mentioned in her report, we were concerned about the QUEST grant and began meeting with EMDC on a weekly and bi-weekly basis. EMDC rose to the occasion. They not only surpassed the enrollment goal (158 goal—214 actual); they took money from another board who was having trouble spending their funds and spent that too. Erin congratulated EMDC on the herculean effort.

Tom gave a PowerPoint presentation on the PY24 year in review. The presentation was sent to all board members and is also being sent with the minutes.

Approval of Policies (Supportive Services, Record Retention, Follow Up)

Erin sent the policies prior to the meeting. Supportive Services are the services that help people get through their training or into direct employment. EMDC can pay for such items as work or interview clothing, mileage reimbursement, tools, vaccines, car repair, childcare, and technology, among other items. All changes were highlighted in yellow. Caps were raised due to rising costs. There are two additions: the purchase of a bike or E-bike as transportation is a huge barrier; and translation technology due to the number of immigrants we serve. The current Records Retention policy was only in draft form, so it was revised to reflect the federal and state regulations and the accounting standards of retention of financial records. The Follow Up policy was one the board never had. While Follow Up policy is defined at the federal level, it must also be defined at the state and local level. Tome added that it allows the board to further refine or define the policy, as long as it at least meets the federal guidelines. Tom also mentioned that it is an opportunity to put policies in laymen’s terms, as the local policies are for the front-line staff.

VOTED: To approve all three policies, as presented, including the changes to the Supportive Services policy.

Motion: Brandi Farrington

Second: Monique Roy

Vote: All in Favor

Disallow Proxy Votes

Cathy explained that at a previous board meeting, one of the board members had their assistant attend in his stead. A vote was taken, and it occurred to the board that they did not have a policy for proxy voting. The Operations Committee discussed it and felt uncomfortable to allow a non-board member to vote. Neither the state nor the Coastal County board allows for proxy voting. If there was a time when a vote needed to be taken but there was not a quorum, the vote could be taken electronically.

VOTED: To add disallowance of proxy votes to the Board By-Laws.

Motion: Razell Ward

Second: Brandi Farrington

Vote: All in Favor

Board Membership (Chair, Vice Chair, Member-at-Large)

Cathy said she would be stepping down at the end of the program year, which is June 30, 2026. She will be focusing on the care of her 90-year-old mother. She would be more than happy to remain on the board as a member, just not the chair. At the Operations Committee meeting, they nominated Billi Mitchell as Vice Chair. The board had been looking to fill that role for some time. Billi has agreed. We will vote on that at the January meeting and discuss a new chair in April. Erin stated that there are three board members who have not been attending. The by-laws state that if a board member misses three meetings in a row, we will consider that a resignation. Sam Hight of Hight Ford in Skowhegan last attended in January of 2024; Kate Durkin of Revision Energy, hasn't been to the last five meetings; and Adam Wilson, a union workforce representative, which we will have to replace with another union rep, hasn't attended the last seven meetings. Board attendance is important. The board members are the eyes and ears in their communities and industries. They can bring valuable information to meetings and to the work of the board and its provider. Laura Columbia, a superintendent in the Franklin County area, has agreed to come on the board to represent education, the region's third largest industry.

Health Insurance

Erin has decided to go on Medicare since she is turning 65 in November. Sara said her Medicare would begin November 1. Her insurance with Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust (MMEHT) will end October 31. The current board policy is to pay the entire health insurance premium for the employee only. Added members will be paid for by the employee. Currently, the board pays \$1,435.90 per month for this premium. The switch would save about \$10,000 for the remainder of this program year. Instead, the board will pay the Medicare premiums, which total \$255 for supplemental insurance, RX, and dental/vision/hearing plans. Erin said her Medicare Part B will be paid for through an HSA from a previous position. Funding moving forward is uncertain, so saving money is important. Erin is hoping the additional funds will allow her to contract out the development of the local plan. It would be important to have someone with an outside perspective. The cost of the previous plan was \$20,000 and some companies charge far more than that. The plan will last four years, and it needs to be a guiding document, not one created for the sole purpose of meeting a WIOA requirement. Erin thinks it would be valuable to make this investment.

VOTED: To pay for Erin's Medicare premiums in lieu of the current MMEHT health insurance.

Motion: Charlie Woodworth

Second: Razell Ward

Vote: All in Favor

Cathy mentioned that the board also needed to vote on the hiring of an outside vendor to develop and write the local plan. Brandi asked if it was more of a needs assessment or a strategic plan. Erin stated that it was a combination of both. There is a requirement to host focus groups among businesses, town leaders, and organizations to understand workforce and training needs. EMDC recently completed the local plan for the northeast, and Erin asked Tom if he wanted to comment. Tom said that they did a complete rebuild of the plan, finding new data resources. One was the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, looking at the number of households without a registered vehicle; also looking at commuting patterns. He said the local plan has to align with the State Workforce Board's plan. He mentioned the northeast held three focus groups: one in Penobscot, one in Aroostook County and the other in Hancock. Erin mentioned that EMDC has a program called JobEQ. Once to twice a year, Tom provides economic overviews of the region and each county. The report showed that the CWM region had the highest number of disconnected youth in the state—a determining factor that led to the marketing plan for youth. Brandi asked if proposals would come back to the board for some dialogue. Erin stated that when the board sends an RFP, board members are asked to volunteer on a committee that reviews proposals and suggests one for board approval. Erin is hopeful to have a vendor selected for board approval by the January meeting.

VOTED: To hire a vendor to develop and write the Local Plan.

Motion: Patricia Rumsey

Second: Razell Ward

Vote: All in Favor

Executive Director's Report:

Erin sent an update to the board on 9/29 regarding the government shutdown. We are funded through federal grants. Our funding cycle differs from the federal government, though. Our program year is July 1 – June 30; the federal government is October 1 – September 30. Just for the record, we discuss our awards using PY (Program Year), while the feds use FY (Fiscal Year). That is why you will see references to PY and FY below. So, when we receive our Program Year funds at the beginning of July, the money is a mix of two federal cycles. WIOA funds were authorized for FY25 (October 1, 2024-September 30, 2025) through the appropriations bill signed into law on March 15 (Public Law 119-4). The second tranche of funds that become available on Oct. 1 were appropriated in that legislation as well. Could that money be clawed back through a continuing resolution (CR). Yes. The feds are allowed to create a revisionist bill (taking money back/redistributing funds) once during the budget year. The Big Beautiful Bill was a revisionist bill. Since October 1 begins a new budget year for the feds, money could be reduced. However, we still have about \$60,000 dollars from our PY24 allotment that should last through December. The government is shut down, and to this date there is no CONTINUING Resolution (CR). We do have that PY24 funding to see us through, and we have been assured by the regional federal office that someone will be available to release funds when the state sends in our draws. So, for the short term, we are okay. Prior to the shutdown, the House proposed a 30% cut to USDOL and a 35% cut to Employment & Training Administration (ETA). We do not know what the future looks like for funding, as Congress could pass another revisionist bill, which could change our PY25 funds. Erin will continue to follow the work of Congress as it pertains to a CR, a budget, and WIOA reauthorization.

Other updates: we did not get the WANTO grant. There were three applicants from Maine, and none were funded. Again, Erin mentioned the success of QUEST from the experience with the previous NDWG-from sending back money to helping another area spend its money. A significant turnaround. The Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) has been signed and posted on the website. The draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was sent to all partners for additions/deletions/edits. Still waiting on partners to send edits or approve as written.

The Transportation Grant is part of ARPA that Sara mentioned earlier. The \$500,000 grant also included the Youth Marketing Campaign, which is complete; the Community-based Organization outreach campaign, which will be fully spent at the end of December; the transportation grant that has \$210,600 to pay for solutions to transportation barriers to employment; and the Fit First behavioral assessment for \$60,000. The transportation funds could have supported nine businesses. Business partners. Despite extensive outreach regarding the grant, only seven applied. All seven were approved, and contracts have been written for five. Three of the five are recovery homes that will purchase vans to get people to work. One of the businesses, Panolam, is using Western Transportation to provide bus rides for employees. Standard Management Company (SMC), a property management company, was working with a used car business to rent vehicles. The business pulled out, so he switched to buying a company owned vehicle that could transport employees. Erin will meet with Youth Led Justice to help develop a plan where they could work with other Lewiston youth programs to utilize E-bikes for transportation. The seventh approved applicant has been non-responsive. After meeting with Erin and Luke from GoMaine, KBS wanted to rethink their plan. Despite four emails and a phone call from Erin, there was no response. A certified letter was sent. Tracking revealed that the letter was received October 20, and, at this date, no response has been received. Erin reached back out to MDOL to work through ideas for spending the unaccounted \$60,600. With the approval of MDOL, Erin will reach back to the current awardees to see how they might use additional resources.

Former director of the Maine Reentry Network, Bruce Noddin, is now working for the Maine Department of Corrections. He reached out regarding the *Fair Chance to Advance* (FC2A) grant that MDOC is seeking and asked if I would be willing to serve on the steering committee. The grant is from Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national nonprofit focused on transforming the U.S. education and workforce systems an inaugural cohort of State Action Networks. This new initiative will help states expand high-quality postsecondary education and workforce pathways for individuals with histories of incarceration. Supposedly, it will come with a stipend, which will go to the board. There is also a requirement to attend four national meetings, which will be completely paid for by the grant. 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.

Lastly, the search for an administrative assistant has been put on hold due to the uncertainty of future funding. Erin doesn't want to hire someone and has to let them go three months later. When there is a definitive decision from Congress regarding WIOA reauthorization and funding, then there will be a decision around the hiring of an assistant. Erin's greatest need is help with the minutes. She's talked with Kelly Aho from Bonney Staffing for suggestions. She will meet with Carrie to get an idea of the scope of her work. Kelly had suggested calling organizations, like chambers, to see if they would, for a

fee, do minutes. Kelly said that Bonney Staffing would be willing to help without their business charge, but only the hourly wage. She feels that with all the resources in the room, this temporary work could potentially be met. Erin mentioned the possibility of AI taking minutes, knowing that minutes would have to be reviewed. Tom cautioned that, at present, there are state and federal guidelines that prohibit the use of AI in certain circumstances.

Kelly wanted to mention something regarding the transportation grant information. Panolam is a customer of Bonney's and this transportation grant has made a significant difference in their ability to recruit and retain employees. Bonney employees can participate as well. Kelly has worked for Bonney for 22 years and this solution for transportation barriers has been the most significant in its ability to get employees. She also men—it is huge been with Bonney for 22 years. She also mentioned that Panolam offers English classes on site, which is a huge plus. Razell mentioned that Lewiston Adult Ed worked with Panolam to offer English classes on site.

Cathy adjourned the meeting at 10:07.

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday, January 22, 2026, via Zoom