



Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board

Quarterly Workforce Board Meeting Agenda

July 24, 2025

Board approved during October 23, 2025, quarterly meeting

Board Members Present: Cathy Witherspoon, Chris Winstead, Bobbi Avery, Laurie Glidden, Kelly Aho, Grant Provost, Razell Ward, Patricia Rumsey, Nikki Bevans, Brandi Farrington, Billi Mitchell, Charlie Woodworth, Chris Waite, Susan LeClair, Casey Maloney, Trampas Hutches, Diane Frigon

Board Members Absent: Kate Durkin, Sam Hight, Adam Wilson

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

Others Present: Joe Pietroski, Kennebec Commissioner; Jeff Gilbert, Franklin Commissioner; Leah Culliver, EMDC; Mark McInerney, CWRI; Adrian Horn, Main Street Skowhegan; Ginny Carroll, MDOL

Absent:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Cathy called the meeting to order at 9:04 am.

2. Maine MEP intro—Rob Clement

Ron is a Project Manager for Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the board's host for the meeting. Commissioner Pietroski suggested that someone from Maine MEP take a few minutes to share with the board the kind of work they do. Rob stated that Maine MEP is a comprehensive resource available for manufacturers in Maine. They assist with several areas of business improvement, such as develop and maintain quality management systems, ensure that safety requirements are being met, ways to boost production, and help implement innovations. It starts with meeting manufacturers where they are and help them move forward. He encouraged the group to share this information with the manufacturing businesses they know. Maine MEP has a full staff that can travel around the state to meet with manufacturers and help strategize.

3. Introduction/Gratitude for new/retiring board members

Cathy stated that Trampas Hutches was stepping down from the board due to increased responsibilities in his position with MaineHealth. She thanked him for his service. Erin Benson also thanked him saying he was faithful in his attendance at board meetings. She also appreciated his help in identifying another MaineHealth executive that could join the board. Two new board members were approved by county commissioners for service on the board: **Casey Maloney**, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, the Senior Director of Human Resources at MaineHealth, focused on the Mountain Region.

Patricia Rumsey, SPHR, CEBS, SHRM-SCP, is the Senior Human Resources Business Partner/VP for Androscoggin Bank.

4. Approve Meeting Minutes from April 24, 2025

VOTED: To approve the April , 2025 meeting minutes as written.

Motion: Razell Ward Second: Kelly Aho **Vote:** All in Favor

5. Financial Update/PY25 Budget – Sara McLaughlin

Sara reviewed the financial update for the operating budget from 2024 versus where it stands currently in 2025, with most attention paid to the fiscal 2025-2026 budget discussed and approved by the board. The actual financials are through the end of May, though officially the year-end is in June, but she is waiting on remaining invoices to arrive to finish those numbers. The budget was \$474,000, which was funded via 5 different contracts throughout the year. Through the end of May, CWMWDB spent out \$396,000 or 83.5% of the budget. Within the budget this year, and continuing into the next program year, there is some program money that will be managed in-house instead of subcontracting out to EMDC (the service provider). These are Community-Based Organization and transportation mini-grants associated with the Quest and ARPA contracts. Those contracts total \$127,000, which with the administrative budget is relatively small and skews the numbers a bit. Sara showed the budget both with these numbers and without them, which made the budget \$256,000 through the end of May, about 96% of CWMWDB's budget for the year. She doesn't feel that there will be any issues with ending in June on par or slightly over budget. If the budget is over, then there will be less of the 2024 formula funds available to carry into the next fiscal year. The plan was to spend \$73,000 of the total \$180,000 this year and carry \$107,000 into next year. Depending on how things end, this may change that total.

The upcoming budget review for next year shows similarly to the current budget with 4 contracts funding it that include the WIOA formula funds, this will include funds that are being carried over from last year estimated at \$63,000 instead of \$70,000. The upcoming WIOA funds are down from last year, which was \$1.881 million to \$1.663 million. The budget also includes the Quest and ARPA contracts that started several years ago. Quest will finish this year and ARPA in 2026. These funds bring the budget for the year to \$359,000, a bit lower than the current budget, and a good portion of it is skewed by the previously discussed program funds, which compromises about \$89,000. Taking those funds out leaves the actual budget at \$269,000. Erin stated that the \$300,000 listed under ARPA is actually \$500,000. She stated that it started with \$300,000 to the CBO's, leaving out the funds from the Fit First piece of the transportation, and \$210,000 set aside for that which is well on the way to being spent. Sara made a note of the change for future budgeting reports but stated that it doesn't change any of the other numbers within the budget. She stated that salaries and fringe benefits, or the "people" costs, make up the large numbers that comprise most of the expenses. This includes salary for Erin, an administrative assistant on a part-time schedule, benefits like workers compensation and such. Brandi Farrington asked if the percentage around salaries is pretty static every year historically. Sara stated that the board always has an executive director and an administrative assistant, but it depends. Some contracts require a dedicated person assigned to them, which usually contain revenue for those positions within the contract, but this is not always the case.

Cathy asked if the part-time position was for set hours or if the person was allowed to set their own schedule. Erin stated that the schedule is flexible with times that will be mandatory for

meetings, but that it is remote and generally flexible. Cathy stated that that would make it easier to fill the position. Sara mentioned that she has a placeholder for the budget that is dependent on if the WANTO grant (Women in Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Occupations) is awarded to CWMWDB, an overview was given of the grant at the request of Cathy. She also stated that there are times when mid-year there are contracts or funds that come through which alter the budget in the positive, like with the dislocated worker funds. This means that someone could be hired to work 20 hours a week and with the additional funds that could change to needing someone to work more hours.

Brandi asked if Erin felt that the federal funding is solid at this point. Erin said yes, but everyone is waiting on a report that was requested by President Trump when he asked DHHS, DOL and DOE that all have workforce funding to look at what's happening and how funds can be streamlined. Brandi mentioned that her agency was in a similar position with HUD funding and they are creating a backup plan. Sara said at the moment we have no backup plan.

Vote to approve the 2025-2026 Budget:

VOTED: To approve the budget with the addition of the ARPA dollars being moved into the contractual funds.

Motion: Razell Ward **Second:** Brandi Farrington **Vote:** All in Favor

Joe asked, from the budget numbers that were available last year to the budget numbers available this year, what does that look like? Sara explained that it is a little less due to the decrease in funding and the timeline left for spending with both the Quest and ARPA grants. Overall, there was about a 10% cut in funding from last year to this year.

6. Economic Overview—Mark McInerney

The key takeaways to Mark's presentation were:

- Falling birth rates over many decades have resulted in a slowing of population growth rates and an advancing population age structure.
- These demographic trends have impacted the labor market resulting in slower job and labor force growth rates and contributed to a shifting balance with relatively more job openings than unemployed job seekers.
- Demand has shifted towards workers in healthcare, business and financials, management, computer and mathematical occupational groups and away from workers in office and administrative support roles.
- Predictions from economists about the impact of AI very widely. AI could have the effect of displacing workers in some occupations and increasing demand for workers in others.
- Compared to past waves of automation in which impacts were concentrated in specific industries and geographic areas, impacted workers in specific education and demographic groups, the impact of AI could be much more diffuse.
- Occupations most likely to be impacted by AI include those in the computer and mathematical and administrative support groups. These jobs often involve skills related to computer/IT, analysis/critical thinking, writing/reading, problem-solving and decision-making.

- Jobs in these fields are somewhat divided between higher-paying roles that require advanced education/training for entry and lower-paying positions-- many clerical or administrative in nature-- that have already experienced declining labor demand in recent decades.

Erin stated that she would share the slideshow with everyone for them to take a more in-depth look at it and opened the floor to discussions around the information Mark shared.

Jeff Gilbert asked Mark what Governor Mills is doing to promote the research and findings? Mark explained that the workforce implications are one of many areas of the AI task force and that includes the impacts they may have on healthcare, education, the public sector, and more. They are focusing on how to effectively deliver public services to a variety of constituents with this technology as well as addressing the potential harm of it and how it may impact fraud or scams, energy demands and how it might strain the grid. All of these are focuses and areas that the task force is working on in various ways. The task force has been asked to put forth specific policy recommendations for the Governor which is tentatively scheduled to be delivered in the fall.

Mark stated that from his area of expertise it's a matter of assessing how well the workforce system, including local boards and service providers, can deliver services. For example, if the workforce is impacted by worker layoffs due to AI, how well is the workforce system able to work with and support those people to ready them to return to the labor market. The other piece Mark mentioned was to think about how MDOL and other areas of government serve their mission and deliver services to a variety of constituents in an environment of constrained resources and potential budget cuts. This is causing them to think about how to use this technology to be more effective and more effectively serve the people of Maine.

Jeff Gilbert stated that he has heard about some stats that state that the trades seem to be an area where there will be a large push in the future that would affect electricians, plumbers, etc. and is interested in how to develop the future of economic development and how to get the right people who can assist in getting those things started as soon as possible. Mark agreed with that thought and stated that he feels that this area is not one that will be highly impacted by AI but will always be an important workforce area for success in Maine. Cathy stated that she can see how tradespeople could use AI to solve and do various tasks. She asked the room how many people use AI at this time for work and stated that it is very efficient in several tasks that can be done in half the time like writing job descriptions and other documentation.

Bobbi asked if Mark had any statistics on how many people are leaving Maine due to the cost of living as she is seeing and feeling the impact of this a lot in her particular area. Mark said that what is striking to him is that Maine is relatively affordable a few years ago and what happened immediately after the pandemic where a lot of migration happened, and people were able to work remotely or choose where they wanted to live and work. This influenced the real estate market and other markets along with it, which led to a significant increase in population and the buyer's pool. Now we're seeing this migration period coming to an end and we're seeing more people leaving than coming to Maine.

Grant asked if there was any indication of the available jobs and the proportions within salary and things for people making \$50,000 or less and those making \$130,000 and to comment on the lack of licensed trades. He feels that what's driving a lot of unemployment is the lack of clean energy being built, there are hundreds of electricians laid off across Maine at this time due to a lack of work opportunities. Some of this is caused by the asking for more skilled tradespeople but a refusal to pay them more money for those upskills and education. He said that a lot of the low-wage positions will remain empty because people don't want to work to be poor and this creates a wage issue between people working remotely and those coming to Maine with skills and education that a lot of people currently in Maine don't have. Mark stated that the sectors with the most open jobs like healthcare where there is a mix of pay and education requirements. He stated that many of the job openings do tend to be within the lower-paying sectors like retail and trade. However, due to the need within those sectors many of the historically low-paying positions are being offered at a higher wage now. There's been a widening gap over many years between work that had specialized skills and workers that have a BA or some kind of graduate degree and have benefitted from rising wages.

Erin stated that when she first joined the workforce sector in 2017 the difference in minimum wage and the lower-paying positions compared to what we are seeing now is very different. CNA's and hotel cleaning people as an example were being paid barely above minimum wage years ago and now are making roughly \$20+ per hour for the same positions and responsibilities. She was at a meeting with CNAs' and direct care workers who were excited that they were going to be getting \$17.00 per hour and after she calculated that and divided your average cost of living it came to about \$600 a month to pay for housing, which shows exactly how little even \$17 per hour really is.

Bobbi said that this brings concerns around anyone on general or social services and the requirement to work and what that looks like for parents who cannot afford childcare but have to work for those services, is that factored into any statistics? Erin stated that legislation has passed and redesigned SNAP and things to support through DHHS things like childcare where the parent pays a portion and DHHS pays the rest. The benefit cliff pushes people to a point where if they get removed from services they cannot afford to live. Bobbi said if anyone hears of any initiative towards this let her know. Cathy and Razell discussed the need for programs that assist children and families being available through schools and the issues that arise with limited funding sources to make that happen. Razell stated that when talking about what's coming and the task force's take on it all, it's important to look at the people who get general assistance or SNAP, etc. and the work requirement placed on them to receive those services. Another piece to this is training, going to school to learn reading, English, certification needs and those may be taken away as counting toward that requirement.

Bobbi mentioned that part of her doctoral studies is immigration population and how we define wealth is different per person and there's no reason to get off general services because once off it they cannot afford to live. Do social services keep people in poverty? Laurie stated that people are advised to limit what they do to ensure they continue to get benefits because of the

childcare costs, transportation, etc. She said the living wage in Maine with one adult and one child is \$41+ per hour. Erin said you can look at MIT.edu site and Erin will get the other site to everyone that uses more reasonable information to formulate the cost of living.

7. Service Provider Report—EMDC

Leah gave the service provider report for EMDC.

Enrollments

EMDC staff exceeded goals in every program! Adults 230 (131%), DW 68 (106%) Youth (Both ISY and OSY) 100 (130%)

Quest Enrolled: 205 of 124 participants at 143.4% of goal.

Referrals/Programming

Similar to previous quarters, the majority of referrals EMDC received came from BES, MEIRS, United Youth Empowerment Services and Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES).

This quarter staff also worked on the Associated General Contractors construction academy and Upward Bound, which resulted in a total of 57 enrollments between WIOA and ARPA programming.

FreeWorld – after a lot of time and effort on Erin’s part, EMDC is pleased to share that they are actively working with 4 individuals at Somerset County Jail to provide them with resources to attain a CDL certification. The hope is that this model will expand to other areas.

Cohort trainings continue to be a major factor in enrollment success. EMDC had a total of 101 people engaged in cohort trainings in Q4. The steep increase in student counts is due to a couple of larger enrollments for healthcare pathways and Associated General Contractors (multiple sites), which represents 46 students.

Staff developed 9 new work experiences and 9 youth participants were enrolled in the Young Mainer's Workforce Program with self-directed objectives. Staff also established 2 new on-the-job training contracts with Industrial Roofing.

Barriers

Staff continue to see the same trends in supportive services: expensive car repairs, travel reimbursement to get to training when customers are located in remote regions of the state. EMDC has not received as many emergency housing support requests this quarter. They have hired 5 new staff to help round out the team and over the next quarter EMDC plans to focus more on progressive employment and recovery partners, as well as expanding outreach to local employers.

Success story

Sometimes staff see success after a participant experiences a major setback. Cody came to EMDC through the DW program in 2023. He had been working as a mason tender and after he was laid off, his goal was to obtain an Associate’s Degree and start a new career. Along the way he experienced a major setback and had to pause his progress. He didn’t let this deter him and he returned, finished his training and earned a degree in Heavy Duty Equipment Mechanics and secured full time employment as Student Technician for United Agriculture and Turf.

Erin mentioned that a past National Dislocated Worker Grant—the Opioid grant Connecting with Opportunities—had a goal of 158, and it was never reached. When the Quest grant came, EMDC once again set a goal of 158. Through December of 2024, enrollments were lagging. To hear that

they not only met the goal but have surpassed it with 2 months remaining is a significant achievement. Credit goes to EMDC and its staff.

8. Industry Updates: Retail—**Bobbi Avery**

Bobbi gave a short presentation on the state of the retail industry stating that her presentation will piggyback off what Mark presented focusing on a multi-generational workforce and “baby boomers” aging out of the retail industry. This includes the expectations of those coming into the workforce versus those leaving the workforce and what that will look like in the retail industry and how to speak to them about that process and deliver that message. One thing Days takes into consideration is online shopping versus in-store shopping and how that experience looks for customers and what that looks like with regards to product and advertising. They are looking at skills levels and skillsets, wellness for employees and customization and what that need is for the new generation of employees to not only hire but maintain long-term employment. Ensuring that each customer experience is customized to them and maintains quality over products is another major focus along with trust and transparency. Flexibility is a major issue where there is no ability to work remotely for Days versus other career options. Looking at how to meet employee needs and maintain workplace needs is always an evolving issue and demands constant thought and development. Talent acquisitions from start to employment are vital so that everyone coming onboard knows exactly what to expect and what is expected of them. She stated that using technology and innovation helps grow and reach more customers across multiple areas by using text messaging, advertising via social media, etc. The other major focus is customer based, how customers are handled and cared for while they are shopping or using Days for services, do they walk away intending to come back based on their experience. Days is big on creating psychological safety and meeting cultural demands for all customers and employees, what can Days provide to ensure everyone has the best experience in any area of services or employment.

Sara wanted to know what Bobbi is seeing for people around PTO and those who have been there longer and have less demands and expectations for time off. Bobbi said that Days doesn’t see this, but that she speaks a lot about resiliency and how they build that within their team and the clash between ages. It is the job of leadership to have those discussions and train managers on accountability and conversations around acceptable expectations and workload balance.

Razell said that those people between 20-30 years old that feel it is less about money and paying the bills and more about not buying into the need to have solid career paths and that learning how to speak to that type of personality is vital for success. Bobbi said that this is a large part of Days recruiting on how to offer and balance work reality and expectation.

9. Executive Director’s Report—**Erin Benson**

- **Administrative Assistant-** the board approved the budget, the commissioners need to approve it and once that is complete the position will be listed for 20 hours a week only. Erin will need people to volunteer to work on the hiring committee for interviews and determination.

- **MOU/IFA-** Erin sent the MOU IFA on June 17th for one last look before signing. On July 10th Job Corps wanted to know how to get out of it to which Erin explained that it is the law. Erin sent a paragraph on how things might change last week and sent that out and sent a reminder for tomorrow to move forward.
- **Local Plan-** The plan is not due until June 30, 2026, but it needs to focus on how everyone within workforce services and assists with everything Mark discussed and the changes good and bad that are heading this way.
- **WANTO-** The Women Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Occupations grant— CWMWDB applied last year and did not receive the grant, but Erin has been working with Tradeswomen of Maine and others to apply again this year. MDOL hired a grant writer who worked with Erin and others to put the grant application through by the deadline of August 8th.
- **WIOA partner updates-** Adult Ed received an email the day before funding for AFLA was to begin stating that no funds were being handed out at this time. The injunction for Job Corps happened, so they have access to money but both centers cannot recruit. They are able to serve current participants. A4TD serving 55+ are also not receiving funds. If one of their participants gets a job, they cannot go back to the program. Of course, that is the goal of the program. Erin is looking at what if anything CWMWDB can do to assist. She is not sure what is to come but she will continue to inform everyone as she gets updates. The transportation grant is moving forward with transportation awardees, so the \$210,000 set aside for that project will go quickly. There are some innovative things happening, one being the Standard Management Company in Waterville who is working with an organization that helps immigrants and refugees get jobs, and an automobile company from whom he will rent cars will help get people to work.

Patricia stated that she received a message from DOL yesterday that there is a public comment period open until the end of the month about a waiver for a WIOA program. She wanted to know if this is something that the board should be asked to comment on or take a stance on. Erin asked Ginny to give a bit more information. Ginny stated that there has been a waiver like this before and trying to get a continuation of it to be allowed to serve a larger amount of in-school youth. Currently, WIOA requires that 75% of funding be spent on out-of-school youth. With a waiver in place, service providers like EMDC were able to connect more in-school youth to the pre-apprenticeship programs last year. The MDOL is trying to work with these programs again to make their way back to redeveloping those relationships. It was discussed with local boards, and they would like the waiver again to provide funding and opportunities with 50% of funding allocated to in-school youth. Erin will create a language template that could be used to submit a comment and send it to everyone. Anyone who wants to submit a comment or statement can do so.

10. Adjourn Meeting

Cathy called to adjourn the meeting at 11:07.

Next Board Meeting Date: Thursday October 23, 2025, Zoom 8:30-10:30 am