
Berks County Workforce Development Board
WDB Meeting Minutes (via MS Teams)
December 15, 2023
7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.

Members Present

Kimberly Baskett
Jenny Batista
Auria Bradley
Ryan Breisch
Dr. Karen Campbell
Ashley Chambers
John DeVere (Phone)
Kristi Gage-Linderman
Crystal Houser
Peggy Kershner
Debra Millman
Rick Olmos
Mark Pinkasavage (Phone)
Patricia Shermot
Barry Unger

Members Absent

Debra Antol
William Dorward
Marianne Brown Egolf
Michael Fischetti
Robert Harrop
Alexia Pursley
Karyn Troxell
David Turner

WDB Staff Present

Daniel Fogarty
Amber Columbo
Megan Noll
Rory Stevenson

Guests Present

Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County Employment Services Team Supervisor
Yanimer Serrano	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Rapid Response Coordinator
Helen Konnick	PA CareerLink® Berks County Site Administrator
David Dopkin	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Assistant Regional Director
David Genaro	Equus Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
Larry Melf	PA CareerLink® Berks County Operator
Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems Inc. – Regional Director
MaryBeth Williams	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Regional Director
Amanda Wilson	PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Supervisor

This meeting was held via Microsoft Teams on December 15, 2023. Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. Our WDB Chairperson, David Turner, sends his regrets on being unable to join this morning's meeting and he has asked our WDB Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Jenny Batista, to chair the meeting in his absence. Accordingly, Ms. Batista called the meeting to order at 7:33a.m.

Ms. Batista informed the members that in this virtual environment, she has asked Mr. Fogarty to help her facilitate the meeting. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being recorded for minutes purposes only and that the recording would be deleted after their completion. Board members were asked to state their names when commenting or making or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

I. Consent Agenda

Mr. Fogarty referred to the consent agenda and asked members if any items were to be moved from the consent agenda for further discussion. There being no such requests, objections, or abstentions, the following items were adopted:

- Approval of the September 15, 2023 Meeting Minutes
- Approval of \$6,000 in Title I Youth funds to support a PY 2023 In School Youth Activity – Berks County Employability Expo 2024 (per Youth Committee)

II. Executive Committee Report

Ms. Batista shared that due to recent employment changes impacting board eligibility, Scott Mengle and Christy Pisker have left the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB). Scott and Christy were thanked for their service with the WDB. In addition, Ms. Batista expressed an overall appreciation and gratitude for the 29 years of service provided by the WDB Executive Assistant, Patricia Spencer, who recently retired on December 5th. Pat will be sincerely missed by all.

Ms. Columbo reviewed the PY 2023 1st Quarter WIOA Title I Performance Outcomes, where the WDB failed to receive the desired “green check mark” signifying successful results for the quarter. The Commonwealth, as a whole, failed to receive the green check mark as well. We have identified issues with some data used to generate our local reports and Ms. Columbo has been working with the contractors and PA Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) to resolve all discrepancies. We should be back on track by the next report in three months.

Next, Mr. Fogarty informed the board of an upcoming virtual Business Services Team (BST) Market Intelligence Briefing planned for January 25th, 2024, via Microsoft Teams from 10:00A.M. – 11:15A.M. The two main topics to be reviewed are:

- 2023 Best Practices in Recruitment and Retention
- English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Workplace Update

III. Finance Committee Report

Ms. Batista invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee report. Referring to the PY 2023 Budget V. Expenditure Report through October 2023, Ms. Noll reported that TANF Youth revenue is trending higher than expected through October due to most of the program expenses occurring for summer youth programs. This will change beginning January 2024 when this program becomes more focused on year-round programming. In addition, direct charge services appear higher than expected through October due to a one-time cost for a WIN Software license renewal occurring in October for a start date of November 1st.

Ms. Noll next reviewed the recommendation by the request-for-proposal (RFP) review committee to award the TANF Youth contract to the sole proposer, Equus Workforce Solutions, in the amount of \$187,483.70. Rick Olmos moved to approve the TANF Youth contract award as presented, and John DeVere seconded the motion. All members approved the TANF Youth contract award. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Noll presented a proposed PY 2023 revised budget for consideration, which included the following changes:

- Increase of \$50,000 in WIOA Dislocated Worker training funds due to growing demand from the dislocated worker population.

- Changed the 2023-2024 Summer In-School Youth Contracts to match the amount proposed in the new TANF Youth award.
- Increase of \$75,000 for Incumbent Worker Training funds due to higher demand from employers for these training funds as recommended by the Training & IP Committee.

John DeVere moved to approve the PY 2023 revised budget as presented, and Ryan Breisch seconded the motion. All members approved the PY 2023 revised budget, but Ms. Kershner abstained from voting due to her organization receiving funds through the approved WDB budget.

IV. One Stop Oversight Committee Report

On Ms. Kershner's behalf, Ms. Columbo explained the recent review of the PA CareerLink® Berks County One-Stop Operator to certify the PA CareerLink® every three years. All certification requirements have been met for the current three-year period beginning 7/1/2023. John DeVere moved to approve the PA CareerLink® Berks County Certification for submission to L&I, and Kimberly Baskett seconded the motion. All members approved the PA CareerLink® Berks County Certification for submission to L&I. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Kershner referred the members to the PY 2023 1st Quarter 'By the Numbers' Report and briefly reviewed the following results:

- Foot Traffic – 7,247 Total Visits
- Orientations – 439 Total Attendees
- Individual Businesses Served – 286 Total

Next, Ms. Kershner reviewed the results of the Fall 2023 Job Fair:

- 937 jobseekers participated - approximately 70% increase in the number of jobseekers as compared to the Fall 2022 Job Fair at the same location (Abraham Lincoln).
- 110 employers, community agencies, and/or training providers participated.
- The next job fair will be held on May 13, 2024, at the DoubleTree in Reading. In response to a question from Mr. Olmos, Ms. Columbo confirmed this includes access to free parking for employers and job seekers through kiosks in the DoubleTree lobby.

V. Youth Committee Report

Ms. Batista referred the members to the Youth Committee minutes to present the updates on the Business Education Partnership (BEP) grants. The following updates were provided for each BEP partner agency:

- Both Berks Career & Technology Center (BCTC) and Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center (RMCTC) are beginning to plan their June 2024 Career Camps.
- The Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC) has begun the coordination of employers and students for the What's So Cool About Manufacturing videos due to be presented at the Double Tree in Reading on April 15th, 2024.
- The Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) is addressing concerns from local employers needing candidates with stronger applied math skills for current and future openings in many high priority occupations (HPOs). At the same time, BCIU is assisting all eighteen school districts in ensuring students are better prepared to meet the applied

math expectations. The initial meeting was held on November 20th with key stakeholders to launch a new project aimed at developing alternative math curriculums.

Ms. Columbo informed the Board of recent changes to the planned resource fair for Disconnected Young Adults. To best serve the population, it was determined that two resource fairs are needed: the first event will target high school seniors, who are undecided about future careers, providing them with information regarding community resources, trade schools, and entry level employment opportunities in April or May 2024; and the second event will be held for disconnected young adults outside of the school districts at the PA CareerLink® Berks County in June or July 2024.

VI. Training and Industry Partnership (IP) Committee Report

Mr. DeVere briefly reviewed the earlier approval of an additional \$75,000 for incumbent worker training presented in the PY 2023 revised budget as recommended by the Training and IP committee. Next Mr. DeVere reviewed the remaining sections of the committee minutes and inquired if there were any questions. With no further questions or areas of discussion, Ms. Batista continued to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Report.

VII. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Report

Ms. Chambers updated the Board on the DEI Committee's 2023-2024 initiative to develop a Resource Guide for employers following the successful DEI Symposium in Spring 2023. There continues to be open communication and feedback provided by the committee on the Resource Guide being developed with a goal for the first draft to be completed by the next committee meeting in February.

VIII. Planning Committee Report

Ms. Millman, Esq., identified the planning committee's main initiative for the current program year as the *Berks Workforce Development Area Post-Pandemic Talent and Demographic Study*. This study will provide the Committee and WDB with a greater and more current understanding of important trends emerging from the size and labor force participation rate(s) of our working age adult population (ages 25-64). During the October 5, 2023 meeting, the committee approved a change in the statement of work for this study to include ages 18-24 to explore the trends and challenges emerging from the local talent pipeline of young adults as well.

As mentioned in the committee minutes, Dr. Anne Zayaitz recently resigned from the committee. Ms. Millman thanked Dr. Zayaitz for her contributions to the committee. In addition, Mr. David Myers, Executive Director of the Berks Alliance has agreed to serve as a non-Board member of the Committee.

Ms. Millman informed the WDB of a presentation offered by Mike Golembiewski from the Berks County Planning Commission which reviewed the Berks County demographic profiles and characteristics from the United States 2020 Census released in 2023. Mr. Golembiewski shared three important conclusions in his presentation:

- Local school districts should be cognizant of potentially lower enrollments and plan accordingly.
- Workforce development efforts should be directed to attracting new workers to the County and retaining/increasing the number of persons (already here) able to work.

- Providers of services to the elderly will continue to have increasing demands for their services.

IX. COO Report

Mr. Fogarty, WDB COO, presented his COO report to the Board with specific emphasis on the following topics:

- **Local Unemployment Rate:** The Berks County seasonally adjusted (SA) unemployment rate in October 2023 stood at a very low 3.8%. This placed us above the historically low 3.4% rate reported for Pennsylvania and slightly below the U.S. rate of 3.9% in October.
- **Local Plant Closings and Large Layoffs in Berks County** were nearly nonexistent over the past three months. However, at the end of November, The Godiva Company announced plans to lay off 50 (mostly production) employees from its Exeter Township manufacturing plant, effective February 1, 2024. Our regional Rapid Response Coordinator is in contact with company management and reports they are supportive of assistance for impacted employees from our local Rapid Response team prior to their last date of employment.
- **Reading to Philadelphia Intercity Passenger Rail Project Accepted in Federal Program:** The Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority (SRPRA) received confirmation last week (12/9/2023) from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) that its application to participate in FRA's Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP) has been accepted. Acceptance enables SRPRA to access federal funds to advance the return of passenger rail service from Reading to Philadelphia and beyond, and significantly increases the likelihood that the service will be successfully implemented. The \$500,000 grant will fund the first of three steps in the CIDP. Selection of the SRPRA for the Corridor ID Program makes it likely that the FRA will continue to support the advancement of the Reading to Philadelphia Intercity Passenger Rail project.

X. Market Intelligence Discussion

Following the COO Report, Mr. Fogarty opened the market intelligence discussion stating that local manufacturing and construction employers have recently indicated that higher interest rates are having some negative impacts on business conditions due to lower customer demand. As a result, it appears that these important wealth-generating industry sectors across our region are slowing hiring plans until after the first of the year while still working to retain existing workers.

Mr. Pinkasavage acknowledged Mr. Fogarty's statements but shared the I.B.E.W. Local Union 743 contractors in our region are not slowing down hiring as the demand for electricians has lately surged as we reach the end of 2023.

Ms. Gage-Linderman explained that Gage Personnel has seen steady demand overall. However, she is not seeing the expected high demand for seasonal workers in Manufacturing. Gage Personnel has found it harder to place skilled workers in new positions due to employer's budgetary constraints. They have also seen a movement in Human Resource talent between employers.

Ms. Batista just returned from a DEI Conference at the Philadelphia Fed. She reported on an emerging trend among grantors to include questions regarding DEI in grant applications.

Mr. Unger expressed the importance of proper onboarding and in creating a positive working environment. In addition, the construction industry is booming due to public contracts. Residential construction has drastically slowed as homeowners have stopped or slowed home improvement projects.

Ms. Baskett explained that OVR still has some openings, but the State is back to refilling positions. There was a temporary delay earlier this year due to the hiring freeze and the required completion of the public service examinations for each applicant.

XI. Public Comment – Mr. Fogarty then asked for any comment from the public. There was no public comment presented.

XII. CY2024 Meetings - The 2024 Berks Workforce Development Board Meetings will be held as follows:

Friday, March 22, 2024 <i>(Hybrid at Berks County South Campus)</i>	7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.
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Friday, June 21, 2024 <i>(MS Teams)</i>	7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.
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Friday, September 20, 2024 <i>(Hybrid at Berks County South Campus)</i>	7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.
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Friday, December 13, 2024 <i>(MS Teams)</i>	7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.
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