

**Workforce Development Board
West Central Workforce Investment Area
PA CareerLink® Lawrence County & Zoom Meeting
September 8, 2023**

Minutes

Members present were: Anna Barenfeld, Tammy Barbati, Angela Bolois, Ben Bush, Kristy DeJoy, Larry Fannie, Mark Grasso, Drew Ginnis, Gary Grant, John Greenwood, Jim Hill, Erin Houston, Tim Jablon, Susan Lautenbacher, Joe Miller, Tony Miller, Adam Neff, Erin Orrico. Gail Steck, John Thigpen, Howard Thompson, Debby Van Kirk, Rod Wilt

Members absent were: Lisa Campbell, Helmut Kraus, Sandy Marwick, Holly Nogav, Frank Telesz, Dominic Vadala

Staff present were: Colleen Chamberlain, Gregg Dogan, Dawn Gregory, Nate Hamilla, Eric Karmecy and Rebecca Moder

Others present were: Paul Buccarelli and Barb Gade

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. Roll was taken, and a quorum was confirmed. The link to the Meeting Agenda posted at www.wcjp.org/workforce-development-board/wdb-meeting-minutes/ was shared in the chat for reference.

A motion to approve the minutes of June 23, 2023, meeting was made by Debby Van Kirk, seconded by Jim Hill and passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

No members of the Public were present.

Gregg Dogan welcomed new members Ben Bush CEO of Forward Lawrence and Mark Grasso of Apex Engineered Products to the Workforce Development Board. Paul Buccarelli also introduced himself as the Business Retention & Workforce Specialist working with Forward Lawrence and the Engage! Program for businesses.

- John Greenwood shared with the Board that since the last WDB meeting, the State Budget Impasse had occurred and affected the operations of the WDB and its programs. Mr. Dogan noted that with the impasse, WCJP did not have the ability to draw down new funding beginning July 1st and also was unable to access prior years' carryover funding in order to continue operations. This resulted in the loss of Paid Work Experience Opportunities for 74 Youth and Young Adults impacting their current wage and future employability, Stoppage of Employer On-the-Job Training contracts to support individuals who require additional training and mentorship by their new employer to retain employment, Delayed payments to local Education & Training Providers who currently have Individual Training Account contracts to serve students pursuing High Priority Occupations, and Reduction in services at the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County and PA CareerLink® Mercer County, among other impacts. Mr. Dogan noted that there is discussion at the state level to modify

the budget approval process so that federal workforce funding is not impacted by a delay in state budget approval in the future. Eric Karmecy shared that had the impasse continued the impacts could have been much more dire including the closure of the PA CareerLink® centers and the ceasing of services to employers and individuals utilizing workforce programs and services.

MANAGEMENT REPORT

- **Motion to Approve the Finance Report through August 31, 2023** - John Greenwood turned things over to Gregg Dogan who referred to the finance section of the meeting packet. This report reflects expenses accrued to date for Program Year '23 beginning July 1, 2023, through August 31, 2023.

The first page lists the grants that West Central currently administers and accrued expenditures through August 31, 2023. Mr. Dogan highlighted the Rapid Response Funds in the amount of \$100,000 in order to serve the approximately 150 individuals affected by the McKesson closure. Competitive grants include Digital Literacy, Youth Reentry, Business Education Partnership, and Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grants.

Page two is the WIOA Title 1 Budget Summary showing WIOA Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker as well as Rapid Response grants, carryover and breakdown of ITAs, OJTs, and other expenditures through August 31, 2023. As of then, WIOA Adult training funds were budgeted at \$200,000 for ITAs, \$330,000 for OJTs and \$50,000 for Training Materials, which may include Books, Supplies, or Tools needed for a training program. Mr. Dogan made note that the greatest demand over the past several years has been for WIOA Adult funding and that the demand for services for Dislocated Workers is very minimal and the Board has approved moving funds from Dislocated Worker to Adult, as is permitted, in order to meet this need.

Adam Neff inquired as to the timing and expiration of the funding sources and whether or not they were usually fully expended. Mr. Dogan shared that typically all the funds are utilized with the exception of the EARN funding which is limited to eligible individuals who are referred by the County Assistance Offices. This is due to the low number of referrals as compared to the budget amounts. He also noted that WIOA funding has a two-year period to be expended and can be carried over. EARN funding has not been able to be carried over and used to serve additional individuals, but the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PWDA) has made this recommendation to the state. John Thigpen asked about the criteria for Eligibility for the EARN Program. Tammy Barbati explained that EARN Program is operated by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) in order to address the needs of welfare clients with barriers to employment. These individuals typically have more impactful barriers to employment and may have exclusions that exempt them from participating as well. Mr. Dogan noted that the EARN allocations are determined on a three-year basis and that other WDAs have expressed similar difficulties in expending their full EARN Allocations. This is another area that PWDA has had discussions on as an Association in order to make recommendations collectively to the state.

Page three is the PA CareerLink® Financial Summary through August 31, 2023. It includes an itemized breakdown of the expenditures of the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County and the PA CareerLink® Mercer County. The salaries and payroll expenses shown only reflect the Site Administrators, Receptionist and Career Resource Center staff as all other staff are paid by their respective agencies.

A motion to approve the Financial Report as presented was made by Jim Hill and seconded by Gary Grant and passed unanimously.

- **WIOA Performance Goals through Q4 of PY 2022** – Tammy Barbati reviewed the performance handouts included in the meeting packet provided by the PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis. As seen from these reports, all of the performance goals were met or exceeded for all of the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth funding, including the Measurable Skill Gains for WIOA Youth, which had lagged behind the goal in prior quarters. Mr. Thigpen if best practices were shared between areas on things like the Youth Measurable Skills Gains. Mr. Dogan noted that while best practices are shared, we are only seeing percentages and not the total number served on the reports. He pointed out in some areas like in WIOA Adult Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit, our negotiated performance is significantly higher than other areas, so that should also be taken into account.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Executive Committee – Mr. Greenwood reiterated a meeting of the Executive Committee took place on July 27th while the PA State Budget Impasse was taking place as was discussed at the beginning of the meeting.

Youth Committee – Dawn Gregory reported that the recent highlights of Youth Committee activities:

Paid Work Experiences and Internships – During this summer, 83 Internship placements were made via the Statewide Activity and TANF Funding. We are beginning to offer Paid Work Experience and Internships for Fall as well.

Business Education Partnership – WCJP is working with the Lawrence County School-to-Work in on the 10th grade Business & Industry Career Fair which is planned for October 12th at the Scottish Rite Cathedral. The Mercer County Business & Industry Career Fair date is set for April 4th at the Park Inn by Radisson.

Mercer County Superintendents' Tour – WCJP is working with the Mercer County Career Center to provide tours of local employers to the school administrators so that they can see and hear firsthand the current and future needs of businesses in the area in order to better prepare their students. The tours are scheduled for October 19th with visits at Walberg Family Pharmacy, NLMK, and lunch at Laurel Technical Institutes showcasing their Kitchen Incubator & Commissary Kitchen.

Youth Reentry – WCJP has been awarded a two-year Youth Reentry grant in order to work with 18-24-Year-Olds who are or have been involved in the Justice System. The goal is to serve 60 individuals to help them get GEDs, Work Experience, and Mentorship to place them along a sustaining career path.

Digital Literacy – Though not exclusive to Youth, WCJP has been awarded a one-year Digital Literacy grant in order to increase the aptitude of individuals. We added incentives in the form of two \$25 gift cards that participants can earn for successfully completing a proctored credential test through Northstar and hope this will enhance youth participation.

STEAM Camps – In Partnership with the United Way of Mercer County and supported by Statewide Activity funds, in-person, hands-on week-long camps took place in June. Nearly 200 6th - 12th grade students participated in one of eight STEAM-focused experiences. The students were provided with artifacts that aligned with the Career Education and Work Standards.

Mr. Greenwood encouraged WCJP to continue to work with Economic Development partners in order to attend local college career fairs and source a comprehensive list of interns in order to matchmake and fill the comprehensive needs of the area employers. Mr. Thigpen noted the collaboration with the Homegrown initiative through Penn-Northwest had been fruitful and recognized at the commonwealth level.

SPECIAL PROJECTS & PA CAREERLINK® OPERATOR UPDATE

- **WORC Grant** – Mr. Karmecy presented a summary of the WORC Grant which concludes on September 30, 2023. We have exceeded all the programmatic goals to date ahead of the grant end and have remaining funds that continue to run cohorts to serve additional individuals. These programmatic interventions were focused on three main areas: Pre-Apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, and the WorkAdvance model which is custom designed to meet the needs of employers.
- WCJP has also applied for a WORC Round V grant in order to further convene Manufacturers in Lawrence and Mercer Counties in a model like the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition and continue the sector-focused work. The Abstract was shared with the Board and would give the Manufacturers in our area the chance to stand up a partnership. WCJP is also working with the Northwest Industrial Resource Center to coordinate on Manufacturing sector partnership activities to ensure effectiveness in serving the employers.
- **Recompete Funding** – Mr. Karmecy shared that the Notice of Funding Opportunity under the Economic Development Administration had been announced and we have been in discussion with our Economic Development and other partners across the region on the feasibility to pursue the Pilot and coordinate services across the area.
- **PA CareerLink® Foot Traffic Reports** – Mr. Karmecy shared a summary of Program Year 2022's foot traffic in both centers. A total of 17,617 individuals walked through the doors of the two PA CareerLink® centers between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. We can confirm over 750 Individuals have been placed in employment as a result of the PA CareerLink® assistance.
- **Mercer and Lawrence County Center Updates** – Colleen Chamberlain shared that in the second calendar quarter of 2022, 1,990 unique customers visited the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County as compared with 2,539 during the same time period this year. It is a growth of around 27.5% which reflects the rebound from the pandemic. To date during 2023, 6,956 individuals have visited the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County compared with 6,060 during the same period in 2022, which is an increase of around 14.5%. Daily average foot traffic is approximately 41 people a day, which is around a 12% increase over the prior year. Autumn is a slower time of the year for foot traffic, as some of the seasonally unemployed are returning to work for the school year. Ms. Chamberlain mentioned that the majority of customers visiting the center are coming in to use and seek assistance with computers.

Ms. Chamberlain shared that the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County was a Pilot location for the Digital Intake Initiative and that this allowed our staff to provide feedback during the process to the state. We also shared insights and best practices with the state who implemented solutions based upon this feedback.

At the PA CareerLink® Lawrence County during June, July, and August, four individual employer events, three mini job fairs, and one PA CareerLink® Day event took place. In total for the eight events, 94 jobseekers attended, and resulted in three confirmed hires.

Outreach efforts to bolster awareness of the PA CareerLink® programs and services have been taking place. Ms. Chamber Mary Ann Moss has been providing presentations every six weeks to the UPMC Partial Hospitalization Program and every other month to residents at ARISE. A collaboration career readiness pilot program with ARISE is planned October 16-20th for up to eight participants. Meetings with Rep. Marla Brown are also taking place to provide a briefing of PA CareerLink® services and establish a good line of communication with the new representative.

Mr. Karmecy noted that Ms. Chamberlain shared the anecdotes of how many customers come to the PA CareerLink® center because they either lack access to technology or the digital literacy to utilize it effectively. So, this is a valuable service of the PA CareerLink® centers for our populations.

Nate Hamillia shared updates on the PA CareerLink® Mercer County. Foot traffic decreased 6% over the past quarter from 1,700 to 1,600. Unemployment Compensation is working on moving to a computer-based scheduling system in the future. The Unemployment Rate has decreased 1.3% over the past quarter from 4.8% to 3.5%. The total labor force number for the county has also decreased over the same time period from 47,300 and is down to 46,700.

Mr. Hamilla noted the change in the composition of the employers since he started as Site Administrator in 2021. Healthcare and Social Services represent 19.7% of total employment compared to over 21% two years ago, Manufacturing is currently at 19.4% Compared to 17.1% in the same time period. Retail Trade is the third largest employment sector representing 13.5%. Top employers in the county are: Wabtec, State Government, Walmart, Joy Cone Company, and Steward Sharon Regional Health System.

Over the past quarter, the PA CareerLink® Mercer County hosted four on-site hiring events with ESS, the ARC of Lawrence, Estes Express, and Wheatland Tube with a total of 65 jobseekers attending. Wheatland Tube met with 38 jobseekers and was looking to hire 15 of them. The April 5th Job Fair in the prior quarter was also largely successful and had 55 Employers and 275 Job-seekers attending.

The Digital Intake initiative in Mercer County is going well and staff benefited from being able to preview the implementation in Lawrence County.

The much-anticipated Hermitage FedEx Ground hiring event will take place next Wednesday, September 13th from 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM at the Hickory VFW due to the number of jobseekers expected.

OLD BUSINESS

- **WIOA Keystone Edge and West Central Local Area Plan Modifications** – Rebecca Moder shared that during the last full WDB meeting we were in the 30-day Public Comment Period which then closed July 15th. No public comments were received for either Plan. The Board has received conditional approval of the Plans effective July 1, 2023 provided the Board completes the conditions of the approval and votes to approve it.

A motion to approve the WIOA Keystone Edge and West Central Local Area Plan Modifications was made by Debby Van Kirk and seconded by Drew Ginnis and passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Tim Jablon shared that he had heard that Mercer County Career Center’s welding program had been fully filled with a current waitlist and that was good to hear. He also shared a statistic that the total workforce deficit is projected to increase by 35,000 more workers and that the retention and repopulation efforts are focused on mitigating population and workforce loss. The group discussed this may be a challenge for employers in the near term. Mr. Hamilla noted that FedEx shared that this first phase of hiring was for an anticipated 125 jobs with opportunity to grow in the future.

The next meeting is scheduled for December 14, 2023 at 5:00 PM at the PA CareerLink® Mercer County with the virtual option available.

Adjournment – A motion to adjourn at 5:55 PM was made by Ben Bush, seconded by Debby Van Kirk and passed unanimously.