



MERRIMACK VALLEY WORKFORCE BOARD

Pursuant to Governor Baker's [Emergency Order](#) Modifying the State's Open Meeting Law issued March 12, 2020, the quarterly meeting of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board will be held using remote participation.

Online Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83875610860?pwd=SjlxUVhDRW5PVGhCVHpCYmI3M1Fodz09>

Meeting ID: 838 7561 0860

Meeting Password: 178963

QUARTERLY MEETING

Minutes

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

9:00am

MEMBERS IN PARTICIPATION:

Joseph Bevilacqua, Christian Brennan, Ann Marie Borgesi, Edward Bartkiewicz, Marko Duffy, Cynthia Faulkner, Evelyn Friedman, Andrew Herlihy, Joselyn Marte, Marianne Paley-Nadel, Carol Riemer, Bob Westcott, Cal Williams, Juan Yepez

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Fred Shaheen, Ron Contrado, Robin Hynds, Supt. John Lavoie, Ellen Weinhold, Rosa Muñoz, Lane Glenn, Jeff Linehan, Supt. Maureen Lynch

GUESTS IN PARTICIPATION:

Linda Rohrer, Dawn Beati

STAFF IN PARTICIPTION:

Michael Paglia, Corina Ruiz, Varsha Gandhi, Brian Norris, Tracy Myszkowski, Robin DelNegro, Leah Sparks, Rosmary Marzan, Rosangela Amaro

1. Call to Order

A quorum being present, Chairman Juan Yepez called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

2. Welcome and roll call

Mr. Yepez welcomed everyone and asked for a roll call.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the December 1, 2020 meeting (vote required)

Chairman Yepez called for a motion on the minutes of the December 1, 2020 board meeting.

Motion by Bob Wescott, seconded by Cal Williams to approve the minutes of the December 1, 2020 meeting as submitted. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Report of Chair

Chairman Yepez said at our last meeting Abel Vargas announced that Brian Norris would be appointed Interim Executive Director of the MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board. In his previous position as Director of the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium, Brian worked for the Merrimack Valley Workforce Board as well as the Greater

Lowell, North Shore, and Metro North Workforce Boards. Because his principal office was at the Merrimack Valley Board, he knows the people and the systems well, and is well suited to shepherd the Board through what I expect to be a very busy period.

Chairman Yepez said several transitions issues are happening at once:

- The City of Lawrence has a new Interim Mayor, Kendrys Vasquez, who is also our new Chief Elected Official. This requires us to create a new agreement between the CEO and the Board. MVWB staff are in the process of drafting the new agreement.
- MVWB staff are in the process of developing an update to the Board's By-laws to comply with WIOA rules and MassHire branding.
- The Career Center is subject to annual program reviews and biannual "Certification" audit. The program review is underway, and the Certification will start in March. Corina Ruiz, the newly appointed Deputy Director, is our liaison with the State during these audits.
- The current makeup of the MVWB Board received a "conditional" approval from the State. WIOA rules require that Workforce Boards include a complex set of minimum representation from a variety of community interests. We currently do not meet the minimum requirements for at least 3 categories. Jeff Linehan will provide more details later.
- As of January 1st, 2021, the Career Center Operator/Service Provider (Northern Essex Community College) had not been reimbursed by the Workforce Board for services provided between March 2020 and December 31, 2020. Tracy Myszkowski is leading a task force to reconcile billings to appropriate funding sources and to clear the arrears. As of last week, payments through July were processed. Payments through September will be disbursed next week followed by payment for October through December by the end of March.
- Federal law requires that the Career Center Operator/Service Provider contract must be rebid every four years. That means we must initiate a new procurement process and award a new contract by June 30th of this year. The option exists to bid either for Operator only or for Operator/Service Provider. Workforce Board staff are currently studying the requirements of the procurement process and will outline the procurement options and processes to the Board early in March. The actual process will be managed by the Chief Elected Official and this Board. It will require the creation of a special sub-committee like that of 4 years ago.
- The MVWB, as part of the Northeast Region, is working on the development of a new Regional Healthcare HUB. Similar to the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium, this organization will bring together employers, educators, and the workforce system to help organize training efforts and attract more people to health care jobs in the northeast region.

Juan thanked everyone for their attention and help with these issues as they tackle them over the next quarter.

Joe Bevilacqua congratulated Corina on her appointment of Deputy Director of the MMVWB. Joe said Brian has been doing a terrific job and made a motion to appoint Brian Norris as the permanent Executive Director of the MMVWB. Cal Williams second the motion.

Chairman Yepez called for a motion to appoint Brian Norris as permanent Executive Director of the MMVWB.

Motion by Job Bevilacqua, seconded by Cal Williams, to appoint Brian Norris as the permanent Executive Director of the MMVWB. Motion passed unanimously.

5. Update on Competitive Selection of Career Center Operator/ Service Provider

Brian Norris provided the update. The MMVWB must go out for procurement of a One-Stop Career Center Operator (OSCC) every 4 years. We should have started the process late last year and put out an RFP, but we are putting it together now and hope to have it released in March. We have two procurement options, an OSCC Operator or an OSCC

Operator/ Service Provider. Right now, NECC is the Operator/ Service Provider. We will reach out to Directors in the coming weeks as we put together a Review Team.

6. Career Center Update

Linda Rohrer presented the report.

There are several training programs for which the Career Center has recruited and enrolled:

- EOHED NAMC programs that started in January 2021
 - 11 Students enrolled in Machining at Greater Lawrence Technical School
 - 1 Student enrolled in CNC at Center for Manufacturing Technology
- Career Technical Institute programs that started in February 2021
 - Greater Lawrence Technical School Training Programs
 - 12 students enrolled in Biotechnology Lab Technician
 - 12 students enrolled in HVAC
 - 12 students enrolled in Plumbing
 - Whittier Vocational Technical School
 - 10 students recruited/ready to go for Advanced Manufacturing
 - 8 students recruited/ready to go for Welding

Overall, outreach, recruitment, and assessment were conducted in December and January and resulted in 66 people entering training in February.

Linda mentioned other initiatives underway:

- Southwick/Philips/3 M Touch Systems Dislocated Worker Project (675 workers affected)
- Urban Agenda Grant – City of Haverhill
- Massachusetts COVID-19 Disaster Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant – 32 workers placed in organizations providing food assistance and 4 or 5 individuals in training using ITAs from this grant
- Volunteers of America (2 yr. project; place 136 individuals released from incarceration into jobs)
- Providing unemployment assistance services
- Mass Internet Connect – MA Technology Collaborative - connecting job seekers to internet services, devices (Chromebooks or subsidized laptops), and digital literacy support

The Career Center held a Virtual Job Fair on January 27, 2021. The platform used was Premier Virtual Job Fair and a total of 35 employers and 127 job seekers attended.

Linda announced that sadly, they lost a staff member. Denise Murray passed away on Sunday, January 3rd. There are several staff members with COVID-19 but are recuperating.

NECC provided a Productivity and Time Management Professional Development Session on February 4th which staff found to be very useful.

The career center is currently hiring for the following positions:

- Southwick Grant – Project Manager, 2 Counselors, 1 Peer Counselor
- Business Services Representative
- Recruiter for Denise Murray's position
- Counselor to backfill for staff working with the Volunteers of America (Re-Entry) Project
- Possible Ops Manager type position to support the Executive Director

7. Reports of Committee Chairs

i. Planning and Career Center Committee

The Planning/ Career Center Committee met on Tuesday, February 16th.

Career Center performance for Job Seekers Served and Employers Served were 64% and 54% of plan (58%) respectively. These numbers are reflective of an extraordinarily effective effort to shift to all-remote services. Due primarily to the business impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, employers who hired a referred job seeker remains low at only 30%.

As already detailed in Juan's report, the Workforce Board staff will face difficult projects in the next quarter including Career Center Certification and Career Center Operator/Service Provider procurement.

A significant new initiative called the Northeast Healthcare HUB is underway in partnership with the North Shore and Greater Lowell Workforce Boards. The Executive Directors of the 3 WBs have held several planning meetings including meetings dedicated to hearing from Health Care providers about what skills sets are valued for CNAs and MA, and what career paths are available. The team has also conducted meetings with Educational providers to learn what programs are currently available and how those align with the needs of employers.

I look forward to continuing to work with this group to help bring new people into the profession and to provide effective training that results in career advancement opportunities.

ii. Youth Committee

Cal Williams presented the report.

The Connecting Activities program staff reached out to our partner high schools to ensure that their students continue to receive career awareness, exploration, and immersions related services. The staff continue to support the students and are available to provide workshops virtually in group or individual settings. Even in the midst of this pandemic, many of our young adults have obtained and retained employment. Our working youth have generated over \$320,000.00 in wages since July 2020.

We are happy to report that we will be receiving a funding increase of \$15,000 to support infrastructure and projects that promote the acquisition of communications, critical thinking and problem solving, leadership, and project management skills, and for youth employer engagement.

The YouthWorks Year-Round program started in November in partnership with Haverhill High School. Twelve Haverhill High School students are currently creating and facilitating STEM workshops for elementary schoolers. They will be working up to 125 hours and are earning a stipend of \$13.50 per hour. In addition, they will participate in twenty-five hours of Signal Success workshops. These workshops will guide them in both career exploration and making long term career plans.

The MMVWB received an additional \$126,551.00 YouthWorks Supplemental funding to provide project-based learning opportunities to 40 additional youth. To carry out this project, we have partnered with Haverhill High School, Groundwork Lawrence, and Youth Development Organization, Inc. More information will be shared at our next quarterly board meeting.

iii. Nominating Committee

In absence of Chair Linehan, Brian presented the report.

The MMVWB has been granted Conditional Certification from the MassHire Dept. of Career Services. To obtain certification, we must address the following:

- WIOA Section 107(b)(2)(B) states not less than 51% of the Local Board must be Representatives of Business. The current matrix does not meet the requirement. The current Representatives of Business is 50%.

- WIOA Section 107(b)(2)(B) states not less than 20% of the Local Board must be Representatives of Workforce. The current matrix does not meet the requirement. The current Representative of Workforce is 19%.
- The requirement for Labor Organizations, under Representatives of Workforce has not been met. Only one member in this category is listed.
- The requirement for Registered Apprenticeship, under Representatives of Workforce has not been met*.

Brian asked to the Board to send along any recommendations that would help fulfill the mentioned vacancies.

iv. Finance Report

Bob Wescott said we have sufficient finances. As previously reported, we have not spent as much money as we have in the past but hope we can change that in the upcoming fiscal year.

8. Report of Executive Director

Brian said the Board needs to update the CEO agreement. There have been three leadership changes since the last agreement was signed; a new CEO/ Lawrence Mayor, new Board Chair, and new Executive Director.

Brian talked about the new healthcare HUB initiative in partnership with MassHire Greater Lowell WB and MassHire Northshore WB. The HUB will be implementing a program design that identifies and creates solutions to healthcare talent challenges and shortages across the Northeast region of MA.

Brian empathized that he wants to find a way to not exclude people from training programs due to limited English skills. The Board hopes to address this with the newly awarded Commonwealth Corporation grant, to design an ESOL and occupational skills program in the Merrimack Valley region.

Joselyn Marte thanked Brian for recognizing this challenge. Many of the Adult Learning Center students have issues with ESOL, HiSet and/or criminal history. Evelyn Friedman said Greater Lawrence Community Action (GLCAC) has the same problem.

9. Other Business

Evelyn Friedman announced that GLCAC has an Immigration Attorney, offering free services to residents meeting income requirements.

10. Adjournment (vote required)

Having no further business Chairman Yopez called for a motion to adjourn.

Evelyn Friedman made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ann Marie Borgesi. Motion passed, and meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Recorder