

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
American Job Center Partners Focus Group  
Wednesday January 11, 2023, 9:00am  
MEETING MINUTES

**Attendees**

1. Colleen Clayton, The Gateway Family YMCA
2. Cathy Waters, Urban League of Union County
3. Marlene Loff, Union College
4. Hawa Bonds, Youth Forward
5. Jasmine Sowah, Youth Forward
6. Latoya Bennet, Youth Forward
7. Dr Elaine Sander, Community Foodbank of New Jersey
8. Isaias Rivera, Union County College
9. James R. Brady, Savor Group
10. Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage
11. Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
12. Juanito Chiluisa, NJDOL
13. Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links
14. Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center
15. LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
16. Lily Piatt- Valente, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
17. Marissa Caponera, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
18. Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
19. Nancy Berkenfeld, Elizabeth Public Library
20. Perle Almeida, Union County American Job Center
21. Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center
22. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
23. Jennifer Byczkiewicz Union County American Job Center
24. Lauren Malloy, In Roads to Opportunities
25. Tina Lopez, Division of Social Services
26. Veronica Mwaniki. International Rescue Committee
27. Anthea Williams, NJ Department of Labor
28. Ingrid Macias, NJDOL
29. Srabanti Sarkar, Proceed Inc
30. Natasha Eanes, City of Elizabeth, Re-Entry
31. Jalil Johnson, City of Elizabeth, Re-Entry
32. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
33. Valerie Hendon, Elizabeth Public School Adult Program

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**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato

**Meeting Summary**

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

James Brady, the Chairman of the American Job Center Partners Committee, welcomed everyone to the focus group and asked for everyone to introduce themselves.

**Strategic Plan information:**

Meredith Barracato reviewed slides that discussed the various elements of the strategic plan.

**Discussion Questions:**

**A. How can Union County facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and in-demand industry sector employers, and occupations, in workforce development programs?**

Cathy Waters, Urban League, called employers, letting them know about program services, building a rapport, and asking them to let them know when there are job openings.

Juanito Chiluisa, New Jersey Department of Labor, mentioned employers can access their services through their website and help them post jobs, find job seekers, and help them work with Veterans Services or work base learning representatives.

Veronica Mwaniki, International Rescue Committee, mentioned her teams will go out and look for employers who are willing to work with refugees. Pre-Pandemic they would have employer breakfast where employers could

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meet employers who work with them currently and also meet with refugees who are looking for a job.

Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library, the focus for many employers is a shift to incumbent trainings. Employers want shorter training programs that are easier to work with while maintaining work schedule.

**B. How can Union County create linkage during program delivery between individual customers and employers?**

Srabanti Sarkar, Proceed Inc, mentioned a lot of the clients who visit them are looking for employment at that moment and not focused on long term investment in a career pathway. The clients they deal with are focused on warehouse work.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, mentioned the need to build intentional partnerships with employers and ask employers what are their needs. We need to stop referring people to jobs on websites and understand how can we really help the clients. The Pandemic made their program focus on financial stability to ensure the client is able to support themselves.

Dr. Elaine Sanders, Community Food Bank of New Jersey, it is important to let employers know about the incentives in hiring the clients we serve.

Hawa Bonds, Youth Forward, streamline marketing campaign needs to be consistent so employers know what the information are they able to get.

Carolina Marin, American Job Center, there needs to be more in person outreach because virtual services is not engaging.

Robert Croom, American Job Center, Pepsi hiring event was focused on customers and how to help those customers get hired.

Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage, suggested that attention needs to be paid to the demand side and ask what kind of skills can you give the job seekers to

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move them onto another level. You can not have job fairs looking for high skilled workers when the supply is lower skill. We cannot resolve every employer's workforce development need. Need to do a targeted recruitment for employers. Need to make sure all the programs have activities that focus on career path awareness. There is a need to find employers who is open to giving a low skill worker the opportunity to grow with the company.

**C. How can Union County support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the region?**

Isaias Rivera, Union College, gave an example of bringing the employer to the students during a class so the student can ask questions, work with job developer and get the job right after.

Veronica International Rescue Committee, worked with hotels to ask them for input on their syllabus, gave client tour of the hotel, and the clients got the job.

Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library, asked if all the partners want each other to do that employer engagement or should this be done by a sole agency. It would be more efficient to have one organization doing "air traffic control" to coordinate employer services. A few participants agreed with this comment.

Chairman James Brady agreed that there should be a centralized hub to coordinate employer services.

**D. How can Union County align resources at the state, regional, and local level to create a system of services, supports, and solutions for employers that offer dual benefits for jobseekers and workers in NJ?**

Isaias Rivera, Union College mentioned using Union County Works to help students identify regional job opportunities and meet with employers weekly but partner with different organization to help meet the employer needs.

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Anthea Williams, NJ Department of Labor mentioned the state has industry partnerships and work base learning trainings such as customized training. Employers can identify those areas that the employers need staff to fill. She reference an IT training that was done a few years ago. Anthea Williams mentioned the need for marketing similar to what Middlesex County does. Anthea Williams added the New Jersey Department of Labor has been doing marketing through lunch and learn sessions.

Juanito Chiluisa, New Jersey Department of Labor mentioned they have been using data job search database that list thousands of jobs but the job seeker needs to find the job.

**A. How can we strengthen integrated service models for cross-training staff and technical assistance and use and share information for support service integration across required One-Stop partners?**

- **Wagner Peyser- Rapid Response**
- **Veterans Business Representatives**
- **Mental or emotional health programs**

Anthea Williams, New Jersey Department of Labor mentioned rapid response is a program offered by the Department of Labor were a team will meet with the employer and employees to discuss benefits that can help as they go through the layoff process. They discuss unemployment benefit, health care benefits, and job/training opportunities.

Ingrid Macias, New Jersey Department of Labor, mentioned the various services offered to Veterans and informed the group of a lunch and learn session for Veterans in February.

Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links, offered information on the additional resource for job seekers to help with mental health services. Some of the group

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programs include how to manage stress or programs to help those with substance abuse challenges.

LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth mentioned their programs offer on site mental health services and will now be creating mental health groups and workshops on helping people overcome their anxiety. She will be opening the Trauma Informed Training for the partners to attend.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County mentioned they have hired someone who does hip hop therapy for youth and have a Licensed Social Worker. Mental Health Association of New Jersey offer four different types of training and Juanita is looking to gather different partners to enroll in a training.

Marlene Loff, Union College asked for the mental health flyer that was offered by the county. Meredith Barracato mentioned she would send it to Marlene.

**A. What are ways to expand the implementation of a variety of work-based learning opportunities and programs, including Incumbent Worker Training, On-the-Job Training, Transitional Jobs, Pre-Apprenticeship, and Registered Apprenticeship opportunities?**

No Comment: Need to discuss further at committee meetings.

**B. How can Union County leverage resources across required partners and additional community partners to reduce barriers to employment beyond specific training-related needs?**

Previous meetings have identified various strategies. Details on the sub strategies handout.

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**C. How can Union County ensure engagement in career, training, and follow-up services that meet individual goals and interests, including supportive services that reduce barriers to employment?**

Juanito Chiluisa, New Jersey Department of Labor, asked if a customer need to be enrolled in Social Services for supportive Services. Robert Croom mentioned they do not have to come through social services. Juanita Vargas asked if youth who are not enrolled in the Title I program are eligible for supportive services. Hawa Bonds provided details on how youth can access supportive services through the Youth Forward program.

LaChelle Thompson, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth, asked how can they work together on getting the clients supportive services. She asked if the American Job Center can go to their location for a couple of hours so they can enroll the client. Robert Croom mentioned he can speak to LaChelle offline to set something up.

Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage, asked who can Title II clients call to receive supportive service. He needs a contact person so they can be a liaison to make sure there is someone there to help. Robert Croom informed Julio he can follow up with him on a contact person.

Meredith Barracato mentioned the need to expand the vendor pool to offer clients supportive services and will be an initiative for the strategic plan.

Marlene Loff, Union College, mentioned the Title II program at Union College has been working with their students to see who eligible is for Title I services.

Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County, asked if there were any movement for English Language Learners. Meredith Barracato mentioned the Literacy Committee has been discussing these concerns.

Robert Croom, American Job Center, discussed the VOYCE translation system that has been helping their program overcome the language barrier.

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Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide on the next steps in the strategic planning process. Meeting adjourned.