

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
AMERICAN JOB CENTER PARTNER COMMITTEE  
James Brady, Chairman  
WEDNESDAY, August 23, 2023, 10:00AM Warinanco Sports Arena  
MEETING MINUTES

**Committee Members**

1. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
2. Cathy Waters, Urban League of Union County
3. Edgar Lopez, Elizabeth Development Company
4. Eva Altidor, Union County Department of Human Services DIFFS
5. Franchely Inoa, YWCA Union County
6. Iesha Armore, NJ Department of Labor
7. Ingrid Macias, NJ Department of Labor
8. Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ
9. James LeBrun, Community Food Bank of NJ
10. Jasmin Sowah, Union County Department of Children and Youth Services
11. Jim Brady, Savor Group LLC, Chairman
12. Latoya Bennett, Union County Department of Children and Youth Services
13. Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education
14. Marlene Loff, Union College OF Union County, NJ
15. Michael McLean, NJ Department of Labor, OTWS
16. Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
17. Pamela Mata, NJ Department of Labor OTWS
18. Ronda McClain, Union County Social Services
19. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library

**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato  
Gina Tuesta

**Meeting Summary**

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman James Brady welcomed everyone to the American Job Center partners meeting. The Chairman asked everyone to introduce themselves.

**Review and Approval of June 28, 2023 Minutes:**

Motion was made by Marlene Loff to approve the **June 28, 2023** Committee Meeting Minutes. Franchely Inoa provided the second motion. Motion was carried.

**Standing Agenda Items:** Before Meredith Barracato discussed the standing items, she reviewed a slide discussing the procurement process for the American Job Center Operator, Adult and Dislocated Worker Services and Youth Services. Meredith Barracato explained that the New Jersey Department of Labor requested local areas to issue requests for proposals for the three services listed

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above. A request for proposal was issued on May 24, 2023 for the above-named services. On June 23, 2023 the Union County Workforce Development Board received one submission from the Union County Department of Human Services seeking to apply for the Operator, Adult and Dislocated Worker Services and Youth services provider. After a review process by the evaluation committee made up of Union County Workforce Development Board members a decision was made on July 26, 2023 to grant an award to the Department of Human Services to serve as the American Job Center Operator, and the provider of Adult, Dislocated Workers, youth services. Meredith Barracato encouraged all partners to continue working with the Union County American Job Center.

Isaias Rivera asked if anyone else applied for the grant. Meredith Barracato said no and added that it's a big undertaking, considering it's a large budget.

- **Program Year 2023 Budget:** Meredith Barracato reviewed the program year 2023 budget slides which shows a decrease in funding compared to program year 2022 budget. Meredith Barracato mentioned the grants that were reduced were from WorkFirst New Jersey budgets as well Dislocated Worker funding.

Chairman James Brady asked what was the reason for this reduction. Meredith Barracato mentioned all counties received a reduction in funding but asked Michael McLean from the New Jersey Department of Labor to offer some insights to the reduction in funding. Michael McLean mentioned he believed it was based on a nine month as opposed to twelve-month allocation and Union County's budget was not downsized but resized since there was a no cost extension for up to 90 days. Meredith Barracato mentioned there was an increase in the youth budget.

- **Performance Data:** Meredith Barracato review the unemployment data from the New Jersey Department of labor which shows an unemployment rate for Union County of 4.8%. Meredith Barracato then continued to discuss the program year 2022 FutureWorks data. Meredith Barracato discussed the importance of improving exit numbers, as these numbers impact performance evaluations. Exit numbers refer to individuals who receive training, completed the training, were exited from the program, and secured employment, which is crucial for the NJ Department of Labor's performance evaluation criteria. The evaluation is based on second and fourth-quarter employment rates and the attainment of credentials and measurable skills gains during training. While the American Job Center has been generally

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successful, however they have been asked to increase the number of participants who successfully exit the program in the future.

Franchely Inoa inquired about how participants' skills are measured by vendors and how their performance is monitored. Meredith Barracato clarified that benchmarks are established and, when participants meet these benchmarks during training, the information is immediately recorded in the Americans One Stop Operating System database. Vendors are responsible for tracking individuals' progress and submitting benchmarks that indicate completion of specific hours and readiness for the next stage, aligning with the measurable skills gained data. Meredith Barracato emphasized the importance of maintaining a robust and regularly reviewed contract with the training provider (vendor) to ensure compliance. She stressed the need for accountability in ensuring that vendors deliver the services outlined in the contract and engage with individuals effectively. Oversight is a continuous process, with both the New Jersey Department of Labor and the American Job Center monitoring vendors to ensure adherence to standards.

Isaias Rivera asked if the Loops system is used to confirm job placement. Meredith Barracato mentioned that there is a six-month lag with the Loops system, and this is why the data is collected at two and four months, allowing time for confirmation through the loop system. However, the ideal situation is to have a strong customer relationship where clients provide information directly. The American Job Center can input supplementary information based on what the client reports, which is preferred over using Loops as it provides quicker data updates.

Meredith Barracato discussed the number of individuals who had entered the American Job Center in program year 2022. These individuals had come in for various types of career services which include job search, job placement, training, including soft skills and occupational training. This combination of services was provided by both the American Job Center and the New Jersey Department of Labor Employment Services staff. Employment services offered career services such as job search assistance, job placement assistance, and specialized programs for veterans and an OJT program. Meredith Barracato mentioned that Employment Services had a high volume of individuals and offered quick turnaround services, while the American Job Center provided longer-term care spanning three to six months. Meredith Barracato noted that the most recent exit date data was from April 28,

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despite it being August. The expectation was that this data would be updated in the system in the next few weeks.

Meredith Barracato stressed that the American Job Center and Employment Services Administrators need to understand the reasons individuals were entering the system, the industries they were interested in, and the range of services offered.

**American Job Center Presentation:**

Nasrene Mondol provided a retrospective overview of the previous year, which covered the period from July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. She mentioned that in the beginning, there were many customers at the orientation stage, but as they progressed through the program, the number of participants decreased. This drop-in numbers were attributed to the challenges of engaging a population that faced significant barriers to becoming work-ready. Towards the end of the process, the focus shifted to soft skills and other training programs aimed at helping individuals become self-sufficient. This resulted in serving just below 300 customers in total at the American Job Center (AJC). Nasrene Mondol also discussed the differentiation between adults and dislocated workers, explaining that it was based on an eligibility process. Adults typically represented low-income, low-education individuals, while dislocated workers were those who had lost their jobs and needed assistance in finding new employment.

She touched on the goals set by the federal government and how they were determined based on national data and criteria, acknowledging that the green color indicated exceeding goals, yellow meant meeting them, and red signified falling below. She mentioned that despite the challenges and data lag, the American Job Center's performance aligned with the state's standards.

Nasrene Mondol discussed the challenges related to data lag and identified a disconnect in the communication and contracting cycle between leadership positions, which had been ongoing for a year and a half. The contracting cycle differed from the main training provider contracts, and there were issues with aligning benchmarks. Efforts were being made to rectify these issues and progress had been achieved, although it remained an ongoing process.

Nasrene Mondol provided an overview of various job fairs in her presentation, emphasizing that over 800 people had attended job fairs. However, challenges arose when following up with customers, as only around 40 people had

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confirmed employment, while many remained unresponsive. Engaging and keeping customers involved was a significant challenge, often due to a combination of factors, including transportation issues and motivation.

She discussed strategies to improve engagement, such as building rapport with customers and addressing their concerns about sharing personal information. Efforts were made to assure customers that their data would be kept confidential and used solely for reporting purposes to the federal funder. Nasrene Mondol also highlighted the importance of customers' contributions in helping the program succeed and encouraged their participation in data sharing. These strategies aimed to alleviate concerns and improve customer engagement. Nasrene Mondol acknowledged that the data presented covered a period stretching back to the end of 2020 into 2021, and due to the pandemic, service providers had faced operational challenges. Despite these obstacles, she emphasized that the American Job Center had performed relatively well in the given circumstances.

Carolina Marin outlined the upcoming first annual business summit scheduled for September 12. The summit aimed to educate Union County businesses about the services offered by the American Job Center, particularly highlighting programs like on-the-job training and incumbent worker training. Carolina stressed the need to address the common lack of awareness among businesses, both locally and statewide, regarding these services. The summit was expected to feature panelists and partner organizations, and she encouraged widespread registration.

Additionally, Carolina provided an update on a recent hiring event organized in collaboration with FarmLand at the Plainfield public library. The event had been a success, with a total of 48 candidates in attendance. Out of these, 45 candidates were interviewed, and 16 were selected for a second interview.

Nasrene Mondol reviewed data from Youth Forward, The Literacy Consortium, and Employment Services. Nasrene Mondol asked Jasmine Sowah to share some of Youth Forward highlights which included the Simon Youth Academy graduation.

Nasrene Mondol reviewed Employment Service services such as Tuition Waiver and data from May 2023 which shows the various services offered. Isaias Rivera asked what would be a quick service done by Employment Service Staff. Nasrene Mondol mentioned resume writing, job referral, and mock interviews.

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Meredith Barracato highlighted the fact that for May 2023 Employment Services noted conducting 730 job referrals which feeds into the customer flow data that was discussed earlier. Carolina Marin asked how do the customers get the services because many of the clients she sees do not have resumes and she helps them create resumes. Meredith Barracato mentioned the need to have Employment Services at the meetings to explain the function they provide to customers.

Marlene Loff asked about the Tuition Reimbursement process. Meredith Barracato mentioned she will reach out to Juanito Chiluisa to get specific information about the program. Nasrene Mondol mentioned there are very specific criteria that students will need to follow to qualify for the tuition waiver program.

Isaias Rivera mentioned he would like to know if there is a way to work with Employment Services to see how he could help those 730 clients get trained and jobs since some of them might be interested in their accounting tech program.. Isaias Rivera mentioned he could reach out to the clients and let them know of the various programs available at Union College. Nasrene Mondol mentioned Employment Services is engaging the unemployed individuals in the UI database. Meredith Barracato mentioned more discussions would be needed with Employment Services.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) /Infrastructure Agreement (IFA):**

Meredith Barracato discussed the NJ Department of Labor policy WD-PY21-6 which identifies one of the responsibilities of the One Stop Committee is to *Monitor the implementation of MOU and IFAs to ensure all partner contribute to operations and service delivery as expected.* Meredith Barracato reviewed the required and recommended partnerships under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Meredith Barracato explained the importance of the MOU in establishing clear agreements and collaboration between the various partners involved in workforce development programs. The MOU will outline the roles, responsibilities, and commitments of each partner, ensuring a cohesive and effective approach to delivering services to job seekers and employers. Meredith Barracato also discussed the efforts made to review and update the MOU to align with current program goals and priorities, emphasizing the need for continued cooperation among stakeholders in the pursuit of workforce development objectives identified in the strategic plan.

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Meredith Barracato emphasized that the committee has a responsibility for tracking and monitoring progress to ensure that the established objectives are being achieved. This tracking and monitoring process serve as a means of mutual accountability among committee members. Just as questions were raised regarding the tuition waiver, it was suggested that representatives need to be held accountable for providing necessary information so that it can be shared with participants, fostering transparency and responsible oversight.

Scott Kuchinsky raised a question about the terminology used, particularly the frequent use of "MOU" (Memorandum of Understanding) as opposed to "contract." He inquired whether this distinction was related to the non-binding nature of MOUs. The discussion revolved around the nuances of these terms, with a focus on whether the non-binding aspect implied a lack of commitment. The concern was that the terminology might be replacing the concept, and there was a recognition that different enforcement methods could apply depending on whether it was considered an MOU or a contract. Scott's query also touched on potential implications for certain agencies and the need for guidance from NJ DOL regarding the leverage and effectiveness of MOUs in working with partners. Meredith Barracato mentioned these questions will be shared with the NJ Department of Labor for further guidance since there is a need for clarification but there is more information to be shared.

Nasrene Mondol asked if part of the MOU data sharing responsibility meant partners would have access to the Americans One Stop Operating System? Meredith Barracato responded by mentioning the need to obtain information from partners such as Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is important for the American Job Center because that department does not have access to Americans One Stop Operating System. Meredith Barracato mentioned that the American Job Center does have the capabilities with Union County Works by giving access to their partners. Nasrene Mondol mentioned they are working with the partners to give them access. Scott Kuchinsky mentioned there should be a way to create different access levels among the partnerships. Nasrene Mondol mentioned they are working with the software company to get that done.

Marlene Loff asked if there was a current MOU on file and if so is it being redesigned or improved. Meredith Barracato mentioned there is a MOU on file and NJ Department of Labor has been issuing guidance with specific timeframes on the next steps including templates. Meredith Barracato mentioned in the upcoming weeks the Workforce Development Board will form

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a MOU sub committee that will oversee the development of the MOU/IFA and ask for all committee members to provide input. Meredith Barracato mentioned the new MOU has to be in place by January 1, 2024. Marlene Loff mentioned that in Mercer County there was a need for the Title II program to move their services to the American Job Center and be a part of the Infrastructure agreement. Meredith Barracato mentioned the discussions relating to the infrastructure agreement, go back to those partners who share space. So employment services DVRs, those are those individuals who contribute to the infrastructure.

**Committee Updates:**

- Disability Committee: The Disabilities Committee had been making notable progress, and on August 3, Commissioner Sergio Granados issued a press release concerning an employer survey. This survey aimed to gather input from employers regarding their challenges in hiring individuals with disabilities. The information obtained from this survey would be utilized to create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource. Meredith Barracato encouraged everyone in the room, particularly those involved in hiring decisions, to participate in the survey. She emphasized the importance of collecting extensive feedback, acknowledging that it could be challenging to persuade employers to complete surveys. The survey was designed to gather anonymous input regarding hiring individuals with disabilities, including any reservations or hesitations employers might have. Its primary objective was to improve communication with employers on this matter, given Union County's sizable disabled population, and to ensure that individuals with disabilities had more opportunities for employment. This initiative marked an essential first step for the committee.
- Youth Committee no committee update since June 28, 2023 except new committee member added recently.
- Adult Education & Literacy Committee no committee update since June 28, 2023

**Partner Updates:**

**Cathy Waters, Urban League of Union County:** Cathy Waters discussed the Urban League's involvement in a reentry program that collaborates with the Department of Corrections, specifically New Jersey LEADS. Through this program, they engage with individuals returning from prison to identify their



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needs. The Urban League offers case management support and resource fairs within the prisons to connect with returning citizens before their release. They provide information on available resources, including rental assistance, job placement support, transportation, work uniforms, and more, including financial assistance of up to \$4,000 for one month's rent and security deposits.

Additionally, Cathy mentioned that they had received a grant from the county to incorporate mental health services into the Urban League's offerings. This development was significant because many formerly incarcerated individuals face trauma, and immediate access to mental health services was deemed crucial. The Urban League now provides counseling, life skills coaching, workshops, and access to psychiatrists to address the diverse needs of these individuals. Cathy emphasized the importance of referrals and encouraged anyone with relevant questions or needs to contact their case manager for assistance.

**Edgar Lopez, EDC** discussed their upcoming plans, which include exploring week-long class and a handyman class, both aimed at preparing participants to apply for trade union programs set to open the following year in spring and summer. They also mentioned their ongoing CDL program, which is dealing with a backlog and is about to begin training. The program has recently partnered with a new vendor for training software, with class schedules expected to be released by September. Furthermore, there will be a small cohort for hospitality starting in September.

**Eva Altidor, Union County Department of Human Services** no updates at the moment.

**Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ** They are doing a Cannabis and Port Authority job fair and will be working with Carolina Marin from the American Job Center.

**Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education** On July 12th, a job posting was posted, and as a result, there are now several potential candidates for the position. The aim is to have orientation sessions for instructors in September and subsequently commence the program.

**Marlene Loff, Union College of Union County, NJ** discussed an OPG (Opportunity Partnership Grant) they had received for the Certified Medical Assistant program. This program consists of 508 hours of training, including a 112-

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hour internship component. They collaborated with the state and Women's Services to host successful information sessions, which were promoted through email blasts. Marlene highlighted their valuable partnerships with employers who were actively involved in the grant, assisting with pre-screening of candidates.

Marlene mentioned that they were preparing for the first cohort to start, and plans were in place to fill a second cohort in the spring, which would be located in Plainfield. She emphasized the significance of introducing the Certified Medical Assistant program as a vital training opportunity for the county. This program serves as an entry point for individuals interested in the healthcare field, especially considering the challenges some partners in the county were facing with the Certified Nurse's Assistant program.

Marlene also mentioned the success of various partners in the Literacy Consortium, with classes filling up quickly and waitlists forming. She indicated that they were gearing up for the year ahead, with organizations like Workforce Advantage and Literacy New Jersey also getting started. Marlene concluded by expressing her admiration for the consortium and its remarkable work. They have also developed an IET program in Supply Chain.

**Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library** discussed their challenges during the pandemic, particularly in filling in-person classes for digital literacy. They were seeking clients interested in industry-recognized entry-level Microsoft Office skills, and while their numbers had improved, they still faced difficulties, especially with primarily English-speaking individuals. Interestingly, their classes for Spanish speakers had a significant waitlist.

Scott also mentioned their role as one of the only sites offering the GED test after the disappearance of another high school equivalency test in the state. They were open to accommodating additional dates if needed.

He also shared plans for expanding their facility with support from the State Library and Department of Treasury, turning libraries into more community-oriented spaces. This expansion would provide dedicated areas for partners and organizations like UCC for student recruitment. Scott mentioned that he would be reaching out to request letters of support for this initiative. For those

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interested in the resources mentioned, Scott advised contacting him directly for more information.

**Ingrid Macias, NJ Department of Labor:** During the summer, there was a temporary pause in their regular program as they focused on youth working papers. However, they have now resumed their usual activities. She mentioned their upcoming event on August 31st at 10 am, featuring the Federal Air Marshal Service. This event will serve as an information session for individuals interested in learning about the application process and requirements for joining the Air Marshal service. They will cover topics such as documentation and age limits for applicants, providing all the necessary details for those seeking information on this opportunity.

**James Lebrun, Community Food Bank of NJ:** The current focus is on building partnerships and raising awareness about their culinary, FSCA (Food Service Culinary Arts), and WLC (Warehouse Logistics) programs. The feedback received from prospective students and partners has highlighted the lack of awareness regarding the benefits of these programs.

The culinary program is a 14-week course where students gain hands-on experience in a commercial kitchen under the guidance of experienced chefs. The program also offers opportunities for students to take the ServSafe exam at a managerial level, opening doors for careers in the food service industry or even starting their own food trucks.

In the warehouse logistics program, students work in a warehouse, learn essential skills, and obtain certifications for forklift and pallet jack operation. Additionally, students automatically receive Lean Six Yellow Belt certification upon completion. The program collaborates with organizations like Wakefern to provide job training and interview skills. Several students have already been hired, and the program continues to assist with job placement and post-graduation monitoring.

There are upcoming classes for the FSCA program on October 9 and the WLC program on October 16. Additionally, there are plans to expand the programs to include an office management component in the future.

**Franchely Inoa, YWCA Union County:** expressed her intention to strengthen connections within the community. She mentioned their upcoming project, a career fair, and invited potential partners and anyone with valuable

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information to collaborate with them on this initiative, expressing her enthusiasm for the opportunity.

Chairman James Brady mentioned there is a lot of talent in the room and if anyone needs help to please reach out.

**Meeting Schedule 2023:** Meredith Barracato noted a change in the meeting schedule for 2023.

**Rescheduled**

~~Wednesday, October 18, 2023 9:00am~~

**New Date**

Wednesday October 25, 2023 9:00am

Warinanco Sports Center  
1 Park Drive, Roselle, NJ

**COMMITTEE ADJOURMENT**