

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
LITERACY COMMITTEE  
JULIO SABATER CHAIRMAN  
MEETING MINUTES: September 21, 2023 10:00am Via Zoom

**Committee Members**

1. Julio Sabater- Committee Chair, Workforce Advantage
2. Colleen Connell, Plainfield Public Library
3. Marlene Loff, Union College of Union County, NJ
4. Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ
5. Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center
6. Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center
7. Jennifer Byczkiewicz, Union County American Job Center
8. Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education
9. Vera Liang, International Rescue Committee
10. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
11. Mehtap Akay, International Rescue Committee

**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato  
Antonio Rivera

**Meeting Summary**

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Chairman Sabater began the meeting by welcoming everyone and introduced himself as the Chair of the Literacy committee, and serves as the Executive Director of Workforce Advantage. Chairman Sabater mentioned he looked forward to a very productive meeting. Chairman Sabater noted they had a full agenda and hoped everyone finds it productive, so the committee could move forward.

Additionally Chairman Sabater added that him and Meredith Barracato have made an interesting discovery he would like to share with everyone because they have managed to narrow down several issues into one. Chairman Sabater mentioned this focus would allow the committee to prioritize and primarily focusing on the one that would address many of the items we've been discussing. All committee members were asked to introduce themselves.

**Review and Approval of The April 13, 2023, Meeting Minutes:**

Marlene Loff made a motion to approve the **April 13, 2023 minutes**. Lyle Moseley seconded the meeting minutes. Motion carried.

**Standing Items**

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**a. PY2023 Budget:** Meredith Barracato provided an overview of several standing agenda items, including the budget, performance, and recently received unemployment data. Regarding the program year 2023 budget, she displayed a pie chart on the screen illustrating allocations to adult, dislocated worker, youth, GA, and TANF programs, totaling just under \$6 million. A comparison with program year 22 revealed reductions in funding from the New Jersey Department of Labor, particularly in GA, SNAP, TANF, and dislocated worker allocations.

Meredith explained that these reductions were statewide and attributed to a waiver in place, exempting some public assistance recipients from mandatory work activities. However, the Department of Labor emphasized monitoring performance and spending rates across all counties. Counties not utilizing their allocations would face continuous reductions in funding. Therefore, Meredith stressed the importance of local areas collaborating to ensure ongoing use of funding for services.

Chairman Sabater asked if the county would be able to request additional funds if they are able to spend down their current budgets. Antonio Rivera addressed the issue of the budget, highlighting increased active oversight by the state in response to pressure from the US Department of Labor and other federal agencies. Antonio emphasized that this micro oversight at the local level was a significant and lasting change. He warned that the system had undergone changes, and adaptation was crucial to avoid being left behind.

Antonio explained that budget reductions occurred due to unspent funds, prompting a more aggressive approach to recapturing unused resources. He expressed a commitment to challenging the notion of "sacred cows" in the budget, indicating a willingness to reallocate funds for better utilization. Antonio stressed the importance of spending available money to avoid additional costs for the county. Despite challenges, he acknowledged continuous opportunities for pursuing additional funding from the state. However, Antonio's strategy focused on spending as much money as possible to demonstrate responsiveness to needs and justify requests for additional funding. He underscored the pressure on local areas to perform, provide services, and efficiently spend allocated funds.

**b. Performance Data:** Meredith Barracato provided a quick overview of performance information sourced from Future Works, a system that collects data from the American One Stop Operating System database overseen by the American Job Center. She explained that the data

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allows tracking of individuals accessing services from both the American Job Center and Employment Services, the latter of which was not represented in the meeting. Employment Services offers quick one-day career services, including job referrals, placement, and readiness workshops.

Meredith presented the monthly data for program year 2022, indicating an increase in individuals accessing services at the beginning of the year, with the first quarter being the busiest and a decrease towards the end of the year. The pink line represented the number of individuals who exited the system after receiving services. She highlighted that the FutureWorks information was lagging, with data up to August 10 available at the time of the meeting. Chairman Sabater asked if there was a way to separate the data and present the American Job Center data. Meredith expressed her intention to extract that specific data for the next meeting but noted the data she has access to is at a lag. Meredith Barracato suggested asking the American Job Center to provide the information directly, emphasizing the need for real time data that the American Job Center staff collect.

Antonio Rivera acknowledged Julio's point about the American Job Center (AJC) being a hub for various partners. He specified that, concerning Title One and the county's involvement in Dislocated Worker, youth, and TANF programs, the AJC maintained a tracking sheet for currently enrolled individuals and those in training. Antonio clarified that this real-time data wasn't reflected in Meredith's presentation. The data presented by Meredith represented exited clients, not providing insight into current activities.

Antonio highlighted that the AJC was in the best position to offer an understanding of real-time data on active clients. He emphasized that the information shown by Meredith was historical and didn't capture current happenings. Antonio deferred to Robert to provide additional insights on this matter. Robert Croom mentioned that they should be able to produce the report regarding the real-time data on active clients at the American Job Center (AJC). While he wasn't sure if he had the report immediately available, Robert assured that they have tracking systems in place for all the current customers they are serving. Robert Croom asked for more specific details on what data should be presented and Chairman Sabater mentioned Robert should include the performance indicators, enrollments and exit numbers similar to the data that is shown on the slides being reviewed.

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Chairman Sabater expressed a hypothesis based on past Workforce Development Board meetings, noting an urgency due to the availability of significant funds in Title One for both adults and dislocated workers. He referred to a report from a few months ago, emphasizing its relevance in providing context for their current objectives. The urgency stemmed from the integration of Title One and Title Two, and Chairman Sabater sought clarification based on raw data.

Chairman Sabater highlighted the need to move quickly in their integration efforts, particularly in leveraging the Title II population to provide clients to the Title I program. As the committee chair, he urged members to join him in putting substantial effort into this endeavor. He stressed the importance of data as a benchmark for monitoring impact and suggested it would be useful to track the ultimate impact of their integration efforts.

Chairman Sabater positioned his perspective as coming from the Title II community supporting their efforts, emphasizing the need to measure impact for transparency, accountability, and community awareness. Robert Croom stated he understood the request.

Meredith Barracato highlighted the Workforce Development Board meeting discussion about increasing the number of exiters in the various categories. While focusing on the adult category, which includes many Title II participants, she shared that 56 individuals exited the program, and out of those, 41 had secured employment in quarter two. It's important to note that this information reflects activities from five to six quarters in the past. Meredith echoed Chairman Sabater's point about the significance of real-time information, suggesting that the American Job Center could provide more up-to-date and beneficial data.

Antonio Rivera interjected to emphasize that the American Job Center (AJC) does track data, and they possess the information, particularly on the budget side. He urged Robert to ensure that the American Job Center makes this information readily available for all committee meetings, not just the current one, to provide a real-time understanding of the American Job Center's activities.

Antonio addressed the challenge of perception and the need to combat misconceptions about the number of clients served. He clarified that hundreds of people visit the American Job Center every year, emphasizing the importance of having real-time conversations within the

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context of the daily flow at the American Job Center. Antonio expanded the discussion beyond Title I, highlighting the entire system's involvement.

Antonio shared that co-enrollment would soon become a requirement for all state and federal programs. This initiative aimed to address challenges in collaboration, and he stressed the necessity for different programs, including Title One, Title Two, Title Three, and Title Four, to work together. Antonio underscored the importance of breaking down silos, fostering collaboration, and ensuring everyone receives credit for the success of the programs by embracing a more integrated approach at the American Job Center.

**c. Unemployment Data:** Meredith Barracato reviewed the unemployment rate, which was 5.1% in July. And noted over the past couple of months, it has been going up. There has been an increase in the rate itself.

**d. New Jersey Department of Labor Policy:** Meredith highlighted a policy issued by the New Jersey Department of Labor on September 5, specifically addressing assessments for adult basic education and English language learners. She emphasized that the policy contained important highlights, which would be accessible to everyone on the call when she sends out the presentation.

Meredith pointed out a significant change in the policy, stating that as of July 1, all NRS-approved testing instruments were available for use by both youth and adults. This expanded the options beyond the previous specificity of using CASAS unless otherwise stated, now allowing the use of assessments such as TABE 11 and 12 by all partners.

Drawing attention to the importance of coordination in testing, Meredith echoed Antonio and the chairman's sentiments. The Department of Labor emphasized the need for partners to coordinate testing efforts, and they requested specific details in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This included information on who conducts the testing, the method (in person or online), and keeping this information current.

Meredith stressed the urgency of working together in the coming months to produce a document that outlines enrollment, recruitment, and assessment strategies within the county. This information would be documented and memorialized in the MOU. She encouraged everyone to review the policy for further details when they had the chance.

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Chairman Sabater asked Marlene Loff to share with Meredith Barracato the Literacy Consortium MOU that can be used as a baseline for the Workforce Development Board MOU. Marlene mentioned she could share the MOU. Marlene mentioned she designed the MOU with the NJ Department of Labor Literacy office and it outlines the goals and how will the partners work together. Marlene asked Robert if the American Job Center was using the any other test aside from CASAS. Robert mentioned they only use CASAS.

**Strategic Plan Objectives Review:**

Chairman Sabater discussed the pending items from the previous meeting, specifically related to UC works and its implementation. The Chairman discussed prioritizing and addressing these pending issues. The main concern centered around the development of training for the features and benefits of UC works, emphasizing the need for partners to have access to the software. The goal was to streamline the process of tracking referrals, as the current method was deemed inefficient and disruptive. Marlene and Nasrene were highlighted as individuals working on this aspect, but there were challenges in actualizing the plan. The Chairman called for an open and honest discussion on how to overcome barriers and make partner access to UC works a reality.

Robert Croom reported on the readiness of the American Job Center from a UC works standpoint. He mentioned that Jennifer and Tyler, responsible for UC works training, with Jennifer currently on the call. Robert expressed the AJC's preparedness and readiness for training, stating that they only needed partner organizations to provide the names of their staff requiring access to UC works, along with their preferred dates. Despite offering available dates, there was a challenge in finding suitable dates that aligned with everyone's schedules. Robert emphasized their willingness to accommodate and expressed gratitude. Additionally, Lillian Roman mentioned that Jennifer had already begun training some partners, citing examples like Plainfield library and Union College. Robert encouraged partners to share the names of individuals lacking access to UC works so that appropriate training sessions could be arranged. Robert noted that to coordinate the training it should go through Nasrene Mondol.

Chairman Sabater asked for an email to be developed to have specific details on how the training will take place and what are the steps. Antonio Rivera mentioned that any communication regarding training done by the American Job Center should come from Robert's office and they can

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provide the details because Meredith Barracato should not cross the operational lines.

Marlene Loff mentioned that the staff at the College were trained around the summer by the American Job Center based on the client's perspective. However, the partners were never given access or were able to view client information on UC Works to identify where the client was in the career service process. Robert mentioned that Tyler can grant access to the partners staff once the partners provide Robert with the names of staff. Meredith Barracato updated the Action Steps slide with details on what the partners will need to do to move the strategy forward. Robert said he will need to confirm with Nasrene some details but he will follow up with the partners by the end of the week. Chairman Sabater asked Marlene to add the training action steps to the Literacy Consortium agenda to ensure all the partners have followed up with Robert on getting them access.

Marlene discussed the college's reception of numerous referrals from AJC to Title Two. She highlighted the establishment of a support system with student service advisors to monitor student progress and report it back to AJC via email. Marlene shared a specific success story of a student who attended classes in spring and summer, returned in September, and secured a full-time position at Walmart due to improved English proficiency.

Chairman Sabater interrupted to refocus on the original issue, emphasizing the need to separate discussions on referrals to AJC and Title Two students. He stressed the importance of addressing the specific issue, which involved reporting outcomes, such as the mentioned full-time job, to AJC through UC works. Marlene acknowledged her current inability to use UC works for reporting due to access restrictions. Chairman Sabater suggested that having access to UC works would streamline reporting instead of relying on email communication.

Antonio Rivera interjected in the discussion, emphasizing two crucial points. Firstly, he highlighted the existence of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) infrastructure funding agreement, which all partners have signed. He underscored that the sharing of data and the use of Union County works are already integrated into this agreement. Antonio emphasized that the regulatory infrastructure is in place, and all key officials, including the county manager, have signed on, eliminating the need for further negotiations.

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Secondly, Antonio inquired about the possibility of more formal training from Geographic Solutions, the vendor providing services. He suggested ensuring equal access for all partners to training resources, such as webinars or live sessions. Antonio recommended direct technical support from Geographic Solutions for better system development. He mentioned having funding to cover these expenses and proposed discussing this during the next meeting with Geographic Solutions. Robert acknowledged the offer, indicating that he would address the matter in the upcoming meeting with Geographic Solutions. Antonio offered his support and resources for training opportunities for all partners in the system.

Chairman Sabater noted he would like to see some movement with the action steps listed in the presentation by the next committee meeting which will take place on November 30, 2023.

Robert expressed the willingness of their team to provide training, but the challenge was coordinating with other partners' availability. They had previously encountered difficulty scheduling a group training session due to varying availabilities among the partners. Robert emphasized that their team was available Monday through Friday and suggested that partners could work out a suitable time or send a representative for training.

Marlene acknowledged this and committed to sending each partner a request for their preferred timeframe. She mentioned specific considerations for partners like Elizabeth Board of Education, which only had evening programs. Marlene assured Robert that they would complete the training requests by the next meeting.

**Literacy Consortium Update:** Marlene Loff provided an overview of the expected level of service from each consortium partner, emphasizing the integrated education and training programs. Marlene highlighted the various programs offered by partners, such as civics components, IC3 certification, and the Microsoft Office Specialist Program. She expressed the intention to create informational flyers for each program to facilitate referrals from the AJC and other partners.

Marlene introduced a new IET program related to supply chain management, aligning with the Community Workforce Initiative. She emphasized the significance of bringing these credentials and IET programs to the county for job opportunities. The Microsoft Office Specialist and ESL programs, designed by



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Literacy New Jersey, were also discussed, focusing on digital literacy and Microsoft suite skills.

Marlene recapped the consortium's progress, noting achievements and challenges in meeting targets. She acknowledged challenges related to GED testing changes during the grant year but expressed satisfaction with the overall success and progress. Marlene underscored the availability of IET programs for all, with partners initiating classes. She encouraged referrals from the American Job Center and other partners for students interested in learning English and obtaining credentials.

Antonio Rivera engaged in a discussion with Marlene Loff, focusing on the topic of digital literacy funding. Antonio expressed inquiries about additional funding for digital literacy, considering the rapidly changing technology landscape and the importance of addressing this need. He clarified that, under WIOA Title One, funding couldn't be allocated for new training not on the eligible training providers list. However, Title Two allowed for such considerations.

Marlene discussed the various digital literacy platforms used within the consortium, mentioning the state's recent interest in these platforms. She highlighted the integration of digital literacy basics into instruction for Title Two students, including the use of Aztec GED flash and GED play on smartphones. Marlene explained that computer usage and online applications were incorporated into the curriculum. Antonio Rivera emphasized the need for broader discussion and consideration of digital literacy on the Title Two side, emphasizing that Title Two funding specifically included provisions for digital literacy.

Marlene mentioned libraries offering computer basics classes and suggested that countywide offerings could be expanded. Antonio continued to emphasize the need to address digital literacy funding systematically within the Title Two framework. Marlene acknowledged the need for community centers to offer digital literacy classes but explained that funding was allocated by the state for developing classes.

Chairman Sabater asked about exploring using the Workforce Learning Link to offer digital literacy course. Antonio Rivera mentioned the Workforce Development Board can speak to the New Jersey Department of Labor regarding that topic.

**Memorandum of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreement:** Meredith Barracato discussed the need to update the Memorandum of Understanding

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(MOU) and Infrastructure Funding Agreements as per the New Jersey Department of Labor's request to all local workforce development boards. The current MOU, set to expire at the end of the year, requires collaboration with core WIOA partners and recommended partners to outline responsibilities for supporting One Stop Center operations.

Core partners include Title One adult and dislocated worker service providers, Title Two educational providers (college, GED, ESL), Title Three entities overseeing unemployment insurance, employment services, and jobs for veterans, and Title Four partners providing services to senior citizens, reentry programs, high school career technical programs, and community service block grants and TANF programs. Additional recommended partnerships include Youth Corp, the New Jersey Department of Labor business outreach team, public libraries, and pre-apprenticeship/apprenticeship programs.

The responsibilities outlined in the MOU include collaboration, cross-training, planning, co-enrollment, and monitoring of One Stop centers to ensure a seamless process for job seekers and employers. The goal is to avoid duplication of services, promote staff cross-training, and align efforts to meet common goals and objectives. The MOU execution process will be overseen by the One Stop American Job Center Partners Committee, following a timeline guided by NJ DOL, with signatures and commitments expected by the end of December.

Antonio Rivera mentioned the collaboration between Robert and himself on the purchase of 69 computers for personnel and for clients to use at the computer labs.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- Thursday November 30, 2023

**COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairman Sabater thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.