

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
DISABILITIES COMMITTEE
Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, CHAIRWOMAN
MEETING MINUTES: September 14, 2023 10:00AM via Zoom

Committee Members

1. Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center
2. Manny Ramirez, Union County Bureau of ADA Compliance
3. Marc Schweitzer, NJDVRS Business Outreach Team
4. Elizabeth Paskewich, Division of Individual and Family Support Services
5. Diana Calle, Union County Office for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs
6. Ed Faver, DVRS
7. Adam Kubler, New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities
8. Kendal Jones, Goodwill New York/New Jersey

Union County Workforce Development Staff

Antonio Rivera, Director

Meredith Barracato, Policy and Strategic Planning Advisor

Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions:

Meredith Barracato informed committee members Chairwoman Walsh Rintzler had a family emergency and would not be able to attend the meeting. Meredith Barracato shared she and the chairwoman did speak about the agenda and will provide the Chairwoman's feedback. Meredith Barracato asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Approval of March 22, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

Ed Faver made a motion to approve the March 22, 2023 meeting minutes.

Manny Ramirez second the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Standing Items:

a. PY2023 Budget: During the meeting, Meredith Barracato presented the program year 23 budget allocations, revealing a total budget of just under \$6 million. The allocations were distributed across various categories, including adults, youth, dislocated workers, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), GA snap, and the workforce learning link. Notably, a significant reduction in funding from the New Jersey Department of Labor was observed when comparing the 2022 and 2023 budgets.

The reduction in funding primarily affected TANF, GA, and Dislocated Worker budgets. Meredith Barracato explained that the Department of

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Labor had heightened oversight and monitoring of budgets in local areas. The Department identified that many local areas struggled to spend down allocated funds. Consequently, the Department opted to reallocate these resources through grants with other vendors. Regrettably, this reallocation had a negative impact at the county level. Marc Schweitzer asked about the increase in the youth budget for PY 2023. Meredith Barracato highlighted that the success of the American Job Center and the Youth Forward program in spending down their funding for program year 21 was a contributing factor. This achievement played a role in the decision to increase their budget, as the history of effectively utilizing allocated funds influenced the budget review. During the meetings, emphasis was placed on the significance of collaboration and co-enrollment. The goal was to ensure that all partners involved in the call could effectively use the available funding.

Antonio Rivera provided context to the budget reduction issue, explaining that before the pandemic, there was a requirement for New Jersey's TANF population to participate in programs. However, due to the pandemic, this requirement was eliminated. In the post-pandemic period, there has been a soft reentry, where the participation requirement is no longer mandatory but more of an option.

Antonio Rivera highlighted the challenge of transitioning from a situation where individuals were at home without the obligation to participate to suddenly making a non-mandatory demand for their return. The soft reentry presented difficulties in encouraging participants to engage again, as there was no longer a mandatory requirement, only a voluntary option. Despite the Department of Labor stating otherwise, clients had little incentive to reengage, posing a challenge for One Stop and its partners in reaching out to these clients. As a consequence, there was a need to redistribute funding and strategize on how to maintain the same level of service with reduced resources.

b. Performance Data:

Meredith Barracato discussed the American Job Center workflow, focusing on Program Year 22 data from Future Works. This data included individuals seeking employment services, job seekers, and those looking for training assistance and career services.

In August 2022, 212 individuals enrolled in various career services, ranging from short-term job search assistance to more extended three to six-month services such as training or job coaching. Historically, the first

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quarter of the year, especially January, saw increased activity with individuals gearing up for job searches and training requests.

Meredith Barracato noted that the data presented was subject to lag, as it was collected up to April 28, and more recent figures were expected in the coming weeks. In the first quarter of 2023, a notable number of individuals sought services. At the previous meeting, Meredith emphasized the need for a deeper analysis of individuals coming in, particularly those who identified as disabled or were deemed disabled through the assessment process.

Out of the 73 individuals identified as disabled, most were working with the New Jersey Department of Labor Employment Service department, seeking specific career services like job search, job placement, and workshops. A few were looking for training services. Meredith Barracato highlighted the Chairwoman's request on capturing accurate information provided to the American Job Center to ensure it reflects the population served by the American Job Center and the New Jersey Department of Labor. Manny Ramirez asked Meredith to explain the difference between the number of participants served versus the number of participants enrolled. Meredith explained that the numbers of served are also people who are from Program year 2021 and that is why the number is larger.

Meredith Barracato provided the county's performance data regarding WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) trainings during the meeting. The data categorized individuals seeking occupational or soft skills training at the American Job Center into groups: adult, dislocated worker, youth, and Wagner Peyser (New Jersey Department of Labor Employment Services).

Among the 56 individuals exited, 41 in the adult category met the performance criteria, securing employment after the second quarter post-exit. For the 45 individuals exited, 30 had employment in quarter four. Out of the 32 individuals who completed training and were exited, 19 received certification. The measurable skills gain, reflecting a person's progress and success in the program, was also considered.

Meredith Barracato noted that the data, as of April 28th, showed a lag, representing participants who went through the American Job Center and exited in 2021 and early 2022. Despite the lag, the numbers were deemed reflective of past performance. The discussion also touched on

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the importance of increasing the number of participants meeting performance criteria and highlighted the historical need for more exitors to align with the high enrollment numbers. Barracato emphasized that the data update process by the New Jersey Department of Labor takes time.

Antonio Rivera asked Meredith Barracato when was the data set from Futureworks pulled and were these the final program year 2022 performance totals. Meredith explained the information presented at the meeting was pulled yesterday and the data still needs to be updated by Futureworks because the most recent exit date reflects 4/28/23 when it should reflect the closing date that took place in mid July.

c. Unemployment Data:

During the meeting, Meredith Barracato discussed the unemployment rate in Union County as of August 2 which was 5.1%. The chart presented showed various ranges of the unemployment rate. However, Meredith Barracato noted that as of yesterday, the unemployment rate had increased, indicating an uptick in the past couple of months. She mentioned attempting to find data on individuals with disabilities and the latest unemployment rate but could only provide information up to January, as she had reported previously.

Employer Survey Results:

Meredith Barracato provided an update on the employer survey that had been discussed in the previous meeting in March. The subcommittee had worked on creating the survey to understand employers' challenges and opportunities in hiring individuals with disabilities. Acknowledging the anticipated difficulty in getting responses, Meredith Barracato noted that only eight employers had responded to the survey. Despite the limited responses, she highlighted that valuable information had been gathered regarding challenges and opportunities.

Meredith Barracato then proceeded to go through the survey results, sharing insights. The respondents represented various sectors such as food service, education, nonprofit, and the public sector, with a majority from Elizabeth. The surveyed companies were predominantly smaller in size, and most were familiar with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) law. The majority expressed a commitment to prioritizing workplace accessibility. Regarding partnerships, most respondents indicated that they were not currently looking to partner, but some mentioned collaboration with American Job Centers, the Civil Service Commission, and colleges and universities.

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In terms of having a point of contact, the majority affirmed having one, as the survey targeted individuals involved in the hiring process. The insights from respondents revealed that many had made workplace modifications, promoted an accessible environment, and offered transportation access. However, there was a lack of awareness about available benefits and resources. When asked about their interests, respondents showed a preference for customized job training, job coaching, career services, virtual and in-person recruiting, and family leave information.

On behalf of Chairwoman Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, Meredith Barracato expressed gratitude to those who participated in creating the survey, highlighting the subcommittee's efforts in meeting twice during the summer to ensure the survey's completion in time for the ADA anniversary. The survey results aligned with past discussions, particularly emphasizing the challenge of employers being unaware of available benefits and resources.

Adam Kubler asked how was the survey shared with employers? Meredith Barracato explained that the survey was distributed widely through partners, websites, social media, and requested assistance from the New Jersey Department of Labor. Despite challenges, including the timing in early August and people being on vacation, she expressed hope for more responses.

Meredith Barracato shared additional insights from the survey, revealing employers' concerns about addressing people with disabilities, healthcare costs, and turnover rates. Many expressed reluctances to participate in the Disabilities Committee. Barracato highlighted specific feedback, such as individuals not addressing disabilities in interviews due to fear of not being hired and concerns about functionality and accessibility of transportation.

Meredith Barracato discussed the next steps, proposing the creation of an FAQ based on the survey results. She invited participants to express interest in contributing to the FAQ, emphasizing its potential release in October for National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Meredith Barracato mentioned reaching out to the American Job Center and Diana Calle for information on events or initiatives related to the awareness month. Elizabeth Paskewich mentioned they are planning on working with the American Job Center to have some sort of hiring event, but are still working out the details. They are hoping to still have it in the end of October, if not, it might be November, but they are planning on highlighting National Disability Awareness Month, and hopefully have an event. As soon as they have the details ironed out they will share the information. Elizabeth asked for clarification on the FAQ.

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Meredith Barracato clarified that the frequently asked questions (FAQ) would be a flyer created by the committee collectively. Similar to the survey process, committee members would brainstorm and develop the FAQ collaboratively.

Marc Schweitzer noted having challenges with getting responses for surveys they send to employers and agreed its common within the field.

Antonio Rivera put in the chat box guidance from the Office of Disability Employment Policy that can be used as a foundation when creating the Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/publications/faqs>

Diana Calle expressed her excitement about the survey and the discussions around it. She emphasized the need for increased education for employers regarding disability employment. Diana pointed out that while there is significant training for individuals with disabilities, a parallel effort is required to educate employers. She suggested the idea of organizing an employer summit on disability, inviting individuals with disabilities to share their experiences and employers who have successfully hired people with disabilities to showcase the benefits.

Meredith Barracato shared with committee members how the Chairwoman had inquired about representation at Union County's business summit, expressing a desire for vendors serving individuals with disabilities to be included. Meredith Barracato noted that to her knowledge there was no such representation, and the chairwoman expressed interest in having organizations like DVRS represented at future business summits, aligning with Diana's suggestion.

Meredith Barracato further clarified, there have been discussions about the importance of training employers. However, at the last meeting, the committee collectively opted for an approach that begins with the survey, followed by creating an FAQ. The goal is to progressively engage employers, with the October job fair being a potential opportunity. The process involves several steps, echoing sentiments shared by Diana and the chairwoman. Mark Schweitzer suggested the committee use the Project Search model as a way to showcase the positive relationships with employers and individuals with disabilities. Adam mentioned he would be willing to help with connecting the committee with project search. Adam mentioned a national vocational rehabilitation field initiative, an AI community innovation grant, aimed at enhancing relationships between states and people with disabilities in employment. New Jersey's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, along with the

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Department of Education, is collaborating on this grant submission. Mark suggested exploring this opportunity and connecting with the entities involved, emphasizing the potential benefits of partnering with a workforce investment.

Additionally, Mark discussed an ongoing review of an expansion and innovation grant. This aligns with the initiative he mentioned earlier. If approved, Hudson Community Enterprises might handle events like job fairs for Union County in the coming year. Mark, who manages other vendors, wanted to keep everyone informed about these developments. Adam provided links to other programs in the chat box.

https://www.thearcfamilyinstitute.org/file_download/inline/52a30490-d798-43ad-b221-1ca4460bba8b

<https://njbia.org/learn-more-about-on-the-job-training-for-people-with-disabilities-aug-18/>

Memorandum of Understanding/Infrastructure Agreement:

Meredith Barracato discussed the need to update the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and infrastructure 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 state business outreach team, 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.

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Antonio Rivera highlighted the overarching intent of the MOU and Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) as a means to formalize collaboration and address cost-sharing in the event of any incurred expenses. The primary focus is on memorializing the collaboration rather than seeking reimbursement for facility use. The goal is to bring partners into the one-stop shop to engage and collaborate on client services.

The cost-sharing aspect primarily involves core partners, such as DVRs. Antonio mentioned the potential information gap and expressed uncertainty about whether the NJ DOL had communicated details about the IFA MOU to the group.

Committee Member Updates:

American Job Center:

Nasrene Mondol provided an update, mentioning that it is early in the program year, and they are still in the process of setting up contracts to fund in demand trainings. Despite this, services for job seekers are ongoing. She shared that they recently hosted their first annual business summit, which had over 160 registered businesses. The event was successful, and Nasrene expressed gratitude to the board, giving special thanks to Antonio for his meaningful contributions as a panelist. The initiative is expected to continue with Commissioner Chair moving forward.

Inroads to Opportunities: Not available

Bridgeway Behavioral Health Services: Not available

Department of Labor: Marc Schweitzer mentioned that they are awaiting approval for the Work First Innovation Expansion Grants. He highlighted that their state, operating as a model employer, has been active since January. Currently, they are offering paid internship programs lasting up to eight weeks, fully funded by DVR. The program involves individual evaluation by the employer, and they are also working on promoting on-the-job training programs to generate interest from both individuals and employers.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services:

Ed Faver provided several updates. A counselor who was on maternity leave has returned to work, primarily assisting individuals involved with drug court, the reentry Corporation of Union County, and those recently released from incarceration. Due to overwhelming demand, they are looking to hire a second Spanish-English bilingual counselor. The office is currently managing 1139 open cases.

Ed mentioned the Project SEARCH program administered by Sammy Haredi, focusing on the Summit Medical Center. The program offers high school seniors an opportunity to work, receive education on-site, and benefit from

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job coaching services. The program boasts a 100% placement rate upon graduation, and this year's class has already started. Ed emphasized the success and enthusiasm surrounding the program. In a personal note, Ed announced his retirement on December 31. There has been no identification of a successor and it might take a while before his role will be filled and he will be gone before Veterans Day. Ed informed Antonio he was not sure who will be attending the Workforce Development Board meeting.

The Family Resource Network: Not available

Arc of NJ: Not available

Union County ESC: Not available

Goodwill: Kendall expressed gratitude for the meeting and introduced Goodwill New York, New Jersey's Bridge Program for out-of-school youth with disabilities. The program aims to connect this population with services and training leading to placement in educational or occupational programs, WIOA, military services, apprenticeships, or DVRs. Services include case management, employability and career guidance, financial literacy, education, and workplace readiness training. The target audience is out-of-school youth with disabilities aged 16 to 24 in five northern New Jersey counties. The program offers one-on-one and group services, supportive referrals, and partner connections over 12 months, with anticipated job placement around the sixth month. Funding is provided by the New Jersey Division of Labor and Workforce. Goodwill NY/NJ also offers previous voucher services and other youth and adult programs.

Arc of Union County: Not available

Union College: Not available

UC Office for People w/Disability & Special Needs: Diana Calle mentioned they are having recreational events on September 30 and October 20 for people with Disabilities and Special Needs. They are still planning on a hiring event and will share that information when available. They are also looking to create a disabilities directory.

CAU: Not AVAILABLE

Salvation Army: Not Available

ADA Compliance: Manny Ramirez mentioned the county is working on making the website more accessible. Antonio Rivera mentioned there are new regulations released that require county and state website accessible. Antonio mentioned he will share the article with Manny offline.

New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities: Adam Kubler various initiatives that provide information to participants that focus on arming clients with more information on how to maintain their Medicaid and also how to show counselors how to use a new website that explains the social security benefits <http://nj.db101.org/> .

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Meeting Schedule 2023:

- **Wednesday, November 1, 2023 10:00am- 12:00pm**

Committee Adjournment: