

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
YOUTH COMMITTEE
SCOTT KUCHINSKY, CHAIRMAN
Wednesday, October 4, 2023, 10:00AM Via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Committee Members

1. Azim Gray, Plainfield Board of Education
2. Crystal Ahearn, Elizabeth High School
3. Cathy Hart, Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth
4. Elizabeth Clark, Plainfield High School
5. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
6. Juanito Chiluisa, New Jersey Department of Labor- Employment Services
7. Latoya Bennet, Youth Forward
8. Marie Thelusma Chase, Boxwood Learning Center
9. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
10. Elizabeth Ramos, Union College
11. Lily Sanchez Ruiz, Union College
12. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library

UCWDB Staff

Meredith Barracato
Antonio Rivera

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Kuchinsky expressed gratitude for everyone's presence and discussed the importance of ongoing discussions about the direction for the upcoming year. He was pleased to have the American Job Center (AJC) present, anticipating increased connectivity and a stronger presence this year. Chairman Kuchinsky emphasized the collective vision agreed upon by all participants and the significance of having an active and engaged group to make progress on shared goals.

Review and approval of the June 8, 2023, Committee Meeting minutes:

A motion was made by Cathy Hart and seconded by Azim Gray. Motion carried.

Standing Agenda Items:

Performance Data: Meredith Barracato provided an overview of the performance for Program Year 22 (PY 22) and discussed customer flow and the PY 23 based on information shared by Future Works, the company collecting data from the American Job Center. The data presented was from August 10, with the most recent exit date being April 28. She mentioned that there is a lag, but the numbers are expected to be updated soon, as reporting to the US Department of Labor is due after October.

For Program Year 22, 61 individuals were exited, with 36 of them reporting employment in quarter two. In quarter four, 34 individuals were exited, with 24 found to have employment, along with credentials and measurable skills gains. Meredith clarified that this data pertains to individuals exited in 2021 and 2022.

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Regarding customer flow in PY 22, the American Job Center enrolled 26 youth participants from July 1 to June 30. Meredith noted that they continued working with individuals who carried over from PY 21. Throughout the year, 47 individuals were exited, with the highest number of exits in August of PY 22. The presented information was up to August 10.

Program Year 2023 Budget: Meredith Barracato discussed the Program Year 23 budget based on funding received from the New Jersey Department of Labor. The budget breakdown showed that the youth category received just over 1.3 million. However, Meredith noted that anyone over 18 could be co-enrolled as an adult, and there were additional funds for those individuals.

She compared the PY 22 and PY 23 budgets, highlighting reductions indicated in red. The significant reduction came from TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), GA (General Assistance), and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) funding. Meredith explained that the reduction was widespread due to a waiver for public assistance recipients, making work activities voluntary. However, she expressed optimism that this situation might change if the waiver is lifted.

Despite the overall reduction, Meredith pointed out an increase in the youth budget, which could be attributed to the success of the work experience program in PY 21. She hoped to see this trend continue and utilize the funding for PY 23. The presentation concluded with a breakdown of the funding received by program.

Strategic Plan Objective Review: Chairman Kuchinsky began by acknowledging familiar faces from the previous year and welcoming a few new ones. He highlighted the importance of focusing on concrete steps and priorities within the committee's limited gathering time. Reflecting on the major priorities identified in the past, such as expanding ESL across the county, cross-training, and developing a pipeline from in-school youth to out-of-school youth, Chairman Kuchinsky emphasized a commonality observed in every meeting.

The recurring theme was the need to streamline processes and establish a central point for managing comprehensive lists and coordinating activities. Chairman Kuchinsky identified this streamlining as a top priority, believing that it would significantly advance progress on various other initiatives. He noted that the key question was about determining who would act as the central point, functioning like an air traffic controller to ensure connectivity and uniformity in sign-up and referral processes.

Chairman Kuchinsky expressed excitement about this being a promising first step and anticipated that addressing this priority would help overcome challenges and enhance coordination between programs. Chairman Kuchinsky expressed the need to set deadlines and identify producing measurable steps in completing objectives. Meredith Barracato brought up the collaboration between United Way Juanita Vargas and Youth Forward Latoya Bennet in terms of

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streamlining eligibility process and asked Latoya to discuss the collaboration. Latoya was having technical difficulties and was unable to speak regarding the collaboration. Scott then asked if anyone from the American Job Center could provide feedback on the collaboration.

Nasrene Mondol provided an update on the use of UC works as a centralized system for overlapping steps. She mentioned that they had just started training with the title two group and were planning to extend the training to other committees. However, Nasrene explained that the process had encountered some delays because certain functions in UC works were not initially turned on, and there were kinks to work out with the Geosolutions team, the team behind UC works. Despite these challenges, Nasrene assured that they were working through the issues and planned to move forward with training for the title two group before extending it to others. Chairman Kuchinsky asked about the specific training dates since the discussions for training partners have been going on for a few months.

Nasrene Mondol discussed the timeline for UC works training, she mentioned that it would likely occur early next year. The exact month was uncertain due to the dependence on coordinating with the Geosolutions team. Internal retraining at the American Job Center was also identified as a necessary step to ensure that the AJC could effectively lead and assist other partners in navigating the system. The internal retraining and coordination with the Geosolutions team were acknowledged as factors contributing to the delay, but the goal remained to initiate the training early next year. Chairman Kuchinsky asked if the committee could get an update before January and the start of November. Nasrene Mondol mentioned that an update can be possible in December and she does not know how long when the internal glitches will be fixed. Chairman Kuchinsky mentioned since its been three years since the system was rolled out then the American Job Center should try to get these resolutions sooner.

Antonio Rivera expressed concern during the meeting, noting a perception of deferring decisions on integration and strategic planning. He emphasized the need to move beyond discussions and take concrete actions, citing the new strategic plan and the existing resources available for geosolutions training. Antonio advocated for minimizing bureaucracy and urged a more proactive approach to collaboration, echoing Scott's diplomatic sentiments. Antonio underscored the importance of adhering to a major policy update from the New Jersey Department of Labor, which mandated co-enrollment. He stressed that delaying co-enrollment could negatively impact performance. Antonio urged the American Job Center to take decisive action, highlighting the committee's role in holding accountable and ensuring tangible progress rather than continuous planning discussions. Nasrene Mondol responded, indicating that they are actively engaged in co-enrollment but will be using UC works as a tool to streamline the process. She acknowledged the current use of paper formats but emphasized providing an update on integrating the system to facilitate a smoother workflow in the long run.

The Chairman expressed hesitation and sought confirmation on the direction of unifying forms, procedures, and policies within the system implementation context. Drawing on experience in system implementation, he emphasized that the coordination effort would heavily rely on the

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functionality provided by UC works. The Chairman suggested that attempting to create a new paper system might not be the most effective approach. He indicated a sense that the scope of the initiative extends beyond mere implementation and emphasized the importance of UC works functionality for centralization. The Chairman sought input and clarification on whether there were additional logical steps that should be taken before the system becomes operational. Antonio Rivera emphasized the capabilities of Geographic Solutions, highlighting its nationwide network and extensive experience. He urged a shift from discussions and planning to the implementation phase, emphasizing that the company possesses the necessary infrastructure, technical expertise, and even hosts national conferences. Antonio emphasized the importance of transitioning from dialogue to action in order to effectively implement the discussed initiatives.

Meredith Barracato addressed the need for a streamlined co-enrollment process between partners such as Plainfield and Elizabeth School District. She emphasized the importance of ensuring a smooth referral process, including clear documentation and eligibility criteria for youth services at the American Job Center. Meredith acknowledged that even if UC works is not fully operational, interim measures should be established for seamless referrals. Nasrene Mondol mentioned the current process where partners reach out to the American Job Center, work on document collection, and initiate co-enrollment. Sharon Best is involved in directly assisting programs with eligibility documents, and Nasrene assured that every program is currently being co-enrolled. Meredith asked Nasrene what do the partners need to do now to ensure their students are co-enrolled. Nasrene Mondol responded by stating that partners should follow the current process to co-enroll. Nasrene Mondol mentioned that partners who send them to the American Job Center can send them to Sharon Best.

Meredith highlighted the importance of providing detailed information about the eligibility process, documentation requirements, and available services at the American Job Center. She emphasized the need for a clear and publicly accessible menu of services, including supportive services and the 14 elements, to effectively communicate with programs such as CTE and youth corp. Meredith suggested creating detailed action steps to operationalize the process and make the information widely available to partners and the community. She discussed the significance of sharing this information in a flyer or document that can be easily distributed.

Antonio Rivera expressed the need to move from planning to action in integrating all partners into the case management process using Geographic Solutions. He suggested exploring if Geographic Solutions has training manuals and videos online, emphasizing the importance of transparency and open-sourcing information. Antonio referred to the ongoing discussions since 2016 and highlighted the urgency to implement the plans laid out, sharing a screenshot from the current strategic plan regarding the Virtual One-Stop Career Center and Geographic Solutions.

Azim Gray, highlighted the need for a process map to delineate the responsibilities of the American Job Center (AJC) in facilitating co-enrollment. He echoed Antonio Rivera's concern about the lack of training for Geographic Solutions, emphasizing the importance of implementation.

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Nasrene Mondol acknowledged the confidentiality aspect of UC Works and mentioned the need for guidance from the county, possibly through a memorandum of agreement, to ensure data privacy when opening the system to other partners. She expressed readiness to collaborate in any capacity to address these issues. Chairman Kuchinsky asked that the county provide guidance regarding confidentiality when using UC Works.

Antonio Rivera clarified that there is already a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and an infrastructure agreement in place, encompassing Geographic Solutions and the confidentiality component. He emphasized that not everyone needs access to all features or confidential information, and the discussion is primarily about understanding and communication regarding co-enrollment. Antonio highlighted the existing guidance on not sharing personal identifiable information and suggested that the partners only need to identify clients using their AOSOS number.

Chairman Kuchinsky asked Nasrene how could the partners help. He highlighted the need to categorize issues into technical, training, and staff turnover problems to address each aspect effectively. Chairman Kuchinsky acknowledged the complexity of fully categorizing all the challenges and sought clarification on potential ways the partners could contribute or help in resolving these issues. Nasrene Mondol mentioned since she was the only one from her team on the call maybe she could have an offline conversation when she meets with her team.

Meredith Barracato asked Nasrene Mondol who on the American Job Center team can be identified as the point person for the processing map and the co-enrollment procedures. Nasrene provided Sharon Best and Latoya Bennet's contact information in the chat box but mentioned she will need to speak to Debbie Ann Anderson regarding the process map.

Latoya K. Bennett
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Sharon Best: sbest@ucnj.org

Meredith Barracato updated the action step slide that focused on youth committee objective. Objective deadline status was set for October 31, 2023 to review a draft of the process map objective. Antonio Rivera included a link to the current MOU/IFA which addresses the data sharing component and personal identifiable information policy. Antonio Rivera asked that

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everyone become familiar with the responsibilities identified in the current memorandum of understanding.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12v_iX6feeMKTtHkvSfLM7OEVY-PgeyQj/view?usp=sharing

Meredith Barracato reviewed the Adult Education and Literacy Committee objective action step slide that was established at the September 21, 2023 meeting where Robert Croom discussed the UC Works partners training and access. Nasrene Mondol mentioned she did not have any updates on the subject especially since Robert was not at the meeting.

American Job Center Update: Latoya Bennet had technical difficulties but added the following comment to the chat box. *Beginning in January 2024 we'll have a Young Adult and Transitioning Youth Intervention program servicing youth ages 18-24*

Memorandum of Understanding/Infrastructure Agreement:

Meredith Barracato provided an update on the MOU renewal process, emphasizing its significance in guiding partners to set plans, budgets, and operationalize shared services. The New Jersey Department of Labor has been actively involved in renewing MOUs, offering guidance, policies, and technical assistance meetings. The required WIOA partnerships, including adult and dislocated worker programs, Job Corps, literacy, unemployment, Employment Services, DVR, senior community programs, reentry programs, CTEs, HUD, and community service block grants, have already signed the current MOU. The New Jersey Department of Labor now recommends including additional partners such as youth corps, NJ Department of Labor business teams, specific training programs, libraries, and public assistance programs.

Meredith highlighted the partnership responsibilities, focusing on collaboration, seamless intake processes, assessment, data sharing, cross-training, joint planning, policy development, co-enrollment, and tracking and monitoring participant services. The New Jersey Department of Labor introduced policies like functional alignment in American Job Centers and workforce service integration and co-enrollment to streamline and enhance efficiency, emphasizing formal supervision, functional teams, and systems integration.

For the MOU renewal, Meredith outlined the MOU-IFA process will be overseen by the American Job Center Partners Committee. The New Jersey Department of Labor provided specific timelines, expecting a draft by the end of fall and the finalized MOU signed by all partners by December 2023. Meredith will be reaching out to partners to discuss their roles in the overall system and the MOU.

Program Updates

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- **CAU: NA**
- **Job Corp: NA**
- **NJ COURTS: NA**
- **Roselle Public School: NA**
- **Union College:** Elizabeth Ramos reported a 4% increase in enrollment for the fall semester across all campuses, highlighting a successful start to the semester. Additionally, they shared news about a new certificate program in hospitality that complements the existing associate's degree. This program was developed based on community feedback. When asked about promotional materials, the speaker suggested checking the college website, where all academic programs, including the new certificate program, can be found.
- **American Job Center: NA**
- **Plainfield Action Corp: NA**
- **Elizabeth Public School:** Crystal Ahearn mentioned they are looking to do more certification and dual enrollments for this school year.
- **Plainfield Public School: NA**
- **NJ Department of Labor: NA**
- **Youth Forward-Union County Division of Youth Services: NA**
- **Boxwood:** Marie Chase provided an update on their organization's activities, mentioning that they continued to serve their youth population through the summer. Seven individuals completed programs in June, and efforts were made to replace them with educational programs like LinkedIn Tech and County College. Currently, the organization is preparing for winter graduation and enrolling new students. The speaker encouraged referrals for individuals up to age 21, especially those on probation or parole. They highlighted a challenge with some students expecting babies in December and January, seeking resources for families in need.

Additionally, the organization is organizing a pop-up store on October 27, transforming their space into an urban boutique for students and alumni to shop. They mentioned a six-week music camp starting on October 15, aimed at helping youth express themselves positively and teaching life skills. Volunteer mentors are invited to participate, and there are plans for a performance in partnership with the African American Culture Center in December, where students would perform in front of a senior citizen audience. The organization is also conducting college tours this fall.

- **The Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth:** Cathy Hart provided updates on initiatives from the Housing Authority. They shared that the Housing Authority received a \$500,000 EPA grant to study air quality, with plans to create youth jobs within that grant opportunity. Additionally, Rutgers University, in collaboration with the Housing Authority and Groundwork Elizabeth, secured a million-dollar grant through the National Science Foundation for a program involving high school seniors. This intergenerational initiative focuses on air quality and air monitors, and it aims to engage youth in working

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with seniors while creating job opportunities. The Housing Authority is actively venturing into the environmental sector to provide job opportunities, and further updates will be shared in the future meetings. The speaker mentioned that their Youth Build and Jobs Plus teams are currently engaged in various activities, and a detailed update will be provided in the next meeting.

- **Plainfield Public Library:** Scott Kuchinsky noted that with the GED being the only testing option after obtaining a diploma, many sites are facing limitations due to high demand. They mentioned being fairly booked for the year but offered to open additional test dates if any programs needed assistance in accommodating students for spring enrollment. The speaker encouraged reaching out to them or a relative who is known to many on the call. Despite talking a lot during the meeting, they expressed the need to address other matters and concluded their update.
- **Make the Road New Jersey: NA**
- **International Rescue Committee: NA**
- **UC Educational Services Commission: NA**
- **United Way of Greater Union County:**
- **Union County Department of Human Services: NA**
- **Elizabeth Development Company:**
- **Union County Vo-Tech-Simon Youth Academy:** Jasmine Lee provided an update on her school, noting that the entire graduating class from the previous year successfully graduated, with all students from 10th to 12th grade recovering their credits. She mentioned that she has been working on interviewing and referrals, with the referrals continuing to come in. Currently, there are 11 students, with two more expected to start next week. Typically, they have 25 to 30 students, and as referrals come in, they will continue to determine eligibility and possibly accept more students.

Jasmine expressed that things have been great, with vendors back on site. Students are receiving mental health services, career and life skills, and mindfulness activities like yoga. Mindfulness and mental health sessions are embedded into the program, helping students start the day positively. She mentioned her anticipation for supportive services to return, especially for transportation assistance, which is crucial for addressing the challenges students face in attending school. Overall, Jasmine reported that things are going well with no complaints and expressed well wishes for everyone.

Lily Sanchez Ruiz: representing Union College, expressed gratitude for the invitation to join the committee. She highlighted the Community College Opportunity Grant, providing tuition-free degree programs for residents, citizens, and undocumented individuals. Lily emphasized the need to inform families, including those earning up to

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\$100,000, about the available opportunities. She offered to provide presentations in multiple languages and share literature to support the community. Lily expressed her commitment to attending committee meetings regularly and concluded with a motion to adjourn, which was seconded and approved. The meeting closed with a reminder to stay engaged between meetings for effective collaboration.

VI. Meeting Schedule 2023:

December 7, 2023 10:00am

VII. COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT: Chairman Kuchinsky closed the meeting mentioning that if anyone needs an assistance or would like to discussion any topic further to please reach out to him and Meredith Barracato for assistance. He added that many of the initiatives developed can only be completed outside of the meeting schedule.