

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
AMERICAN JOB CENTER PARTNER COMMITTEE  
James Brady, Chairman  
WEDNESDAY, February 15, 2024, 9:00AM Warinanco Sports Arena  
MEETING MINUTES

**Committee Members**

1. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
2. Colleen Clayton, The Gateway Family YMCA
3. Dr. Lisa Hiscano, Union College of Union County, NJ
4. Eva Altidor, UC Department of Human Services, Community Block Service Grant
5. Franchely Inoa, YWCA of Union County
6. Isaias Rivera, Union College of Union County, NJ
7. James Brady, The Savor Group
8. Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage
9. Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center
10. Marlene Loff, Union College of Union County, NJ
11. Lyle Moseley, Elizabeth Board of Education
12. Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center
13. Anthea Williams, NJ Department of Labor
14. Isabel Jimenez, NJ Department of Labor: WorkFirst NJ Tech
15. Alejandra Londono, United Way of Greater Union County
16. Marissa Caponera, The Housing Authority of Elizabeth: HACE Jobs Plus
17. Scott Kuchinsky, Plainfield Public Library
18. Tony Staynings, Edison Job Corps
19. Nitya LeoGrande, Edison Job Corps
20. Ratyeemah Ward, The Housing Authority of Elizabeth: Youth Build
21. Jeffrey Jackson, Department of Human Services

**Guest(s)**

Carla Donegan, New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA)

**UCWDB Staff**

Meredith Barracato  
Gina Tuesta

**Meeting Summary**

**Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman James Brady extended a warm welcome to all attendees and suggested that committee members relocate to a table where they are not already acquainted with their colleagues. Emphasizing the significance of collaboration and the value of forging connections with fresh partners, Chairman Brady encouraged everyone to introduce themselves and the organizations they represent.

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**Review and Approval of October 25, 2023 Meeting Minutes:**

Motion was made by Dr Lisa Hiscano to approve the **October 25, 2023** Committee Meeting Minutes. Franchely Inoa provided the second motion. Motion was carried.

Isaias Rivera asked if someone who wasn't present at the meeting can make a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Dr Lisa Hiscano responded that she was present at the October 25 meeting. Meredith Barracato explained that if the person read the meeting minutes then they are able to make a motion.

**Standing Agenda Items:**

- **Program Year 2023 Budget:** Meredith Barracato discussed the budgets for Program Year 2022 and Program Year 2023. Meredith Barracato stressed the need for efforts be directed towards spending down adult dislocated worker and youth funding before June 30 to avoid returning it to the New Jersey Department of Labor. Partners were encouraged to submit invoices promptly for payment. Only 19% of Program Year 2023 funding had been disbursed by the meeting date. Meredith Barracato highlight that upon receiving Program Year 2024 funding in July, the focus would shift to spending down PY2023 funds and moving on to PY2024. Meredith Barracato stressed the goal remained to exhaust all funding within each program year by providing services and processing invoices promptly to avoid returning funds to the New Jersey Department of Labor. Meredith Barracato noted that the PY2022 TANF, SNAP, GA, and Workforce Learning Link were closed out as of December 30.

Tony Staynings asked if there was a concern over returning the funds would cause a decrease in future budget allocations. Meredith Barracato explained that for program year 2023 the NJ Department of Labor significantly reduced TANF, GA/SNAP funding for all Workforce Development Boards and issued request for proposals so other community partners could use that funding to provide services. Meredith Barracato that due to this reason it is imperative to use the funding available to provide services to clients and reduce the balances for the grant accounts.

- **Performance Data:** Meredith Barracato shifted the discussion to Future Works the data source used by the New Jersey Department of Labor, encompasses participants in training programs facilitated through the

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American Job Center and employment services. These participants receive various types of training services, including soft skills, occupational training, and educational components.

Overall, the data showed promising numbers, but particular attention was drawn to the youth category, where focus was deemed necessary in the upcoming months. Specifically, there were 51 exiters, individuals who had been exited over a year ago, from the youth category. It was emphasized that partners working with youth need to understand their status within the mandated 12-month follow-up phase post-exit, ensuring they are either engaged in work, receiving educational benefits, or in need of supportive services.

Meredith Barracato highlighted the expected increase in the number of exiters as services are provided. Typically, after individuals receive training grants at the American Job Center, it takes 3 to 6 months to complete the training. The employment search phase intensifies after they exit the program, with assessments conducted at 6 and 12 months post-exit to evaluate employment status, credentials, certifications, and educational gains.

Chairman Brady asked the age of the youth participating in the program. Meredith Barracato mentioned they were between the age of 14 to 21 for in school youth and 18 to 24 for out of school youth participants. Chairman Brady asked why would a 14 year old need services. Meredith Barracato mentioned there was lots of research showing the need to support youth that age to stay in school and provide them intensive services to avoid them from dropping out of school.

Isaias Rivera asked about youth who are about to exit the system but seek additional services would no longer be considered part of the exit system but would be reinstated back into the system. Dr Lisa Hiscano clarified that they would enroll in the adult category while still being counted as a youth until the age of 25 and would be a positive for the youth category because they moved onto an adult service. Meredith Barracato stressed the importance of follow-up to keep individuals engaged and prevent them from falling through the cracks. It was noted that even after turning 25, individuals could still receive adult services, and co-enrollment was encouraged to leverage funding from both programs according to the New Jersey Department of Labor's directives.

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Tony Staynings noted that certain age groups, particularly 14 to 16-year-olds, and their capability to handle certain matters. There was a suggestion to focus on individuals aged 17 to 25, as it was believed they might be better equipped to deal with the challenges. However, it was acknowledged that not all individuals within this age range possess the necessary skills. Despite this, there were opportunities identified, albeit with challenges. Additionally, there was mention of DVRs' absence and their flexibility concerning funding and age requirements.

Meredith Barracato discussed the client flow at the American Job Center, highlighting data updated on the ninth. She clarified that the data concerning the most recent day of program entry ended on December thirtieth. The presentation illustrated the flow of clients into the American Job Centers in Plainfield and Elizabeth, including both physical and virtual entries. Meredith Barracato explained that participants sought Employment Services provided by the New Jersey Department of Labor, which typically included one-day services or job search and resume writing workshops. In contrast, the American Job Center offered longer-term services like occupational training and work readiness programs. She noted that between July and December, employment services worked with 1,500 individuals, while the American job center worked with 367. Meredith Barracato pointed out a pattern in the data, showing a decrease in services around the holidays, affecting job searches and postings.

Isaias Rivera asked if training providers could allocate 15 minutes to explain their services to individuals associated with the American Job Center and Employment Services. He noted that these program have access to most of these individuals, as many of them have previously interacted with the unemployment system and could benefit from learning about the various training provider services.

Meredith Barracato responded by highlighting that the American job center and employment services possess a database containing individuals' contact information and their previous occupations. She emphasized the importance of intentional outreach, mentioning a recent policy requiring a collective effort to focus on specific groups. Barracato suggested leveraging this database for targeted marketing efforts, such as for upcoming events like healthcare job fairs. She concluded by noting

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that these databases are accessible but require collaboration to access effectively.

Dr Lisa Hiscano mentioned Union College has been told that they are unable to do outreach to that population unless it's a Department of Labor funded program. She added that the only programs that have been promoted by the NJ Department of Labor through Employment Services was those grants that have been directly funded by the NJ Department of Labor OPG grants.

Meredith Barracato asked Lillian Roman if the American Job Center still had access to the Crystal report system which allows for the collection of participants in the Unemployment System. Lillian Roman mentioned she was not sure if the data contained in that report she could share with the partners. Meredith Barracato mentioned that during COVID 19 the partners were allowed to do outreach based on those reports. Lillian Roman mentioned she was not sure if this was still the case because the person who oversaw that program is no longer there. Dr. Lisa Hiscano asked if the college could provide the American Job Center the information and the American Job Center then share that with the participants. Dr Lisa Hiscano would like to do targeted outreach based on the report.

Robert Croom mentioned they have not done targeted outreach and he would be speaking to Employment Services. Meredith Barracato noted the American Job Center could do the outreach and not have to get Employment Services involved. Robert Croom noted that as part of the future operations meetings they will be discussing the situation further.

Scott Kuchinsky's noted some concerns and frustration with the current approach to reaching out to clients. He emphasized the ineffectiveness of random phone calls or emails from unfamiliar individuals. Scott Kuchinsky stressed the importance of guiding clients to the appropriate counselors or points of contact to ensure they understand the process. He expressed concern about the lack of clarity in client handoffs between different service providers. Kuchinsky questioned why established procedures for client orientation and handoffs were not being followed, emphasizing the confusion and frustration experienced by clients within the system.

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Jeffrey Jackson asked about the lack of representation from Employment Services and needing them at the meeting to discuss their large client pool. Jeffrey Jackson stated that since Employment Services has that information then they should be at the table to discuss the concerns because the American Job Center does not have the information needed. Meredith Barracato clarified that the American Job Center does have access to the same database as Employment Services and they can also pull the data.

Scott Kuchinsky expressed concerns about the lack of direct communication between American Job Center and training providers. He highlighted the need for a streamlined process for customer referrals between agencies and Title 2 programs. This communication is essential for various programs, including those provided by Employment Services and youth providers. He discussed the importance of providing orientations to customers, which used to be a standard practice but has become less frequent. He emphasized the necessity of adapting to changes and finding alternative methods to ensure customers receive proper guidance. Meredith Barracato acknowledged his concerns and suggested addressing them in the operations meeting to ensure all stakeholders are aware and can work together to find solutions. Chairman Brady asked to be a part of the operations meeting. Robert Croom noted an invitation would follow for all committee members to attend and share their feedback. Meredith Barracato reiterated as part of the Memorandum of Understand there is a need for all partners to attend the upcoming operations meeting to ensure the development of proper procedures, customers flows and referral systems.

Jeffrey Jackson and Scott Kuchinsky, discussed about the importance of system knowledge and expertise in handling certain questions related to services. Scott Kuchinsky emphasized that only counselors are qualified to address these inquiries effectively. Scott Kuchinsky highlighted the challenge of providing accurate information to counselors who may relay it back incorrectly due to their lack of understanding of the system. Scott Kuchinsky expressed concern that if services are segmented off from those who understand funding mechanisms, people won't receive the necessary support. This underscores the necessity of integrating expertise across different aspects of service provision to ensure effective delivery to those in need. Lillian Roman and Isaias Rivera expressed the need to have Juanito Chiluisa from Employment Services as part of the conversation.

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- **Unemployment Data:** discussion revolved around the fluctuating unemployment rate in Union County from January 2023 to December. There was a significant decline in April 2023, followed by a spike in July, with subsequent stabilization towards the end of the year.
- **Labor Market Information:** Meredith Barracato provided updates on the job posting analysis conducted by the New Jersey Department of Labor, focusing specifically on Union County. Despite minor fluctuations, the top industries and occupations remained relatively consistent. However, she emphasized the importance of understanding the common skills required in job postings. In January, there were over 5,000 unique job postings, totaling over 10,000 due to duplications, from over 1,800 employers.

She highlighted key skills sought by employers, including problem-solving, planning, and writing, while noting a deficiency in communication skills. Additionally, she pointed out the growing demand for skills in marketing, auditing, and data analysis. Meredith Barracato stressed the significance of conveying these trends to participants for their professional and educational advancement. Meredith Barracato mentioned that the comprehensive report, along with details on top industries, companies, and areas, would be shared via Google Drive for everyone's reference.

**Job Corp Presentation:**

Tony Staying's emphasized that Job Corp provides opportunities for pre-education, career, technical, or vocational training to youth. The program catered to individuals aged 16 to 24, with flexibility regarding disabilities and no age restrictions. Free housing was provided, and transportation arrangements were adaptable. Tony Staynings highlighted the necessity for changes over the 60-year period, aligning with shifts in funding and infrastructure needs. The organization aimed to transition into an Infrastructure Academy, requiring collaboration with partners, including employers like Solar Landscape. Challenges included addressing the habits of younger participants accustomed to late mornings. Tony Staynings stressed the importance of effective communication to engage students effectively. He also expressed concern over the fate of foster care youths aging out, advocating for resources to prevent homelessness. As Tony Staynings concluded, he offered handouts and his contact information, expressing dedication to the cause despite his semi-retired status.

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Dr Lisa Hiscano asked if Job Corp provides send clients to other places for training and provide them support services while they're in another training? Tony noted that 80% of the training is done on campus at the Edison NJ facility. But they partner with other program to do the solar installation. Nitya LeoGrande provided additional information regarding the eligibility requirements and the opportunity for students to go to other Job Corp locations to receive training they do not offer in NJ. Tony Staynings continued to explain that while in DC, he served as a director of a program and engaged in discussions with high-ranking officials such as the Secretary of the Labor and the Job Corp National Director. They initiated conversations about forming partnerships aimed at more than just hiring a few individuals. During a meeting, he with high ranking officials he challenged a prominent company to commit to hiring 5,000 students annually, which initially seemed unrealistic to others but eventually gained support. He emphasized the significance of grassroots-level partnerships in facilitating meaningful dialogue and impactful actions.

Tony Staynings reiterated Job Corp has a capacity to deal with homelessness, the lack of education, the lack of self-esteem and confidence which is the biggest issue for many of our young people.

Franchely Inoa asked about services for undocumented students because the population she works with tend to be undocumented with limited resources. Tony Staynings noted that they have worked with refugees in the past. Meredith Barracato noted that typically for WIOA funded programs require participants to have at least work authorization in the United States. Meredith Barracato noted that the Department of Human Services in Union County have programs that offer services that do not require work authorization.

Julio Sabater asked about the educational component of the program. Tony Staynings noted they provide basic skills classes as well as all academic requirements for them to obtain their certifications including high school diploma.

Tony Staynings closed his presentation by inviting everyone to their facility for a tour.

**NJ Department of Labor Policy Update:**

Meredith Barracato discussed several policies issued by the New Jersey Department of Labor. One of the policies pertained to partner access to the American Job Center database (Aosos) WD-PY23-7, which serves as a case



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management system for tracking participants. Meredith noted that limited access to certain funded partners was granted by the Department of Labor. Communication had been initiated with the NJ Department of Labor regarding training and the process for granting access to entities such as Union College, which holds a career services grant. Further details needed clarification, but the development was considered significant as it empowered partners to control their data and directly input participant information, eliminating the need for intermediaries. Dr. Lisa Hiscano noted this advancement and noted that the partners need to be at the table when the policy is being developed. Meredith Barracato noted that there are a number of questions that are outstanding to the New Jersey Department of Labor regarding the access, eligibility and training. Dr Lisa Hiscano noted even if they can have a read only access will allow for the improvement of the case management system. Meredith Barracato noted that the American Job Center Operator will need to be looped into the conversation to establish process for data entry and data monitoring.

Scott Kuchinsky asked what does it mean about the implementation of the access to UC Works. Meredith Barracato noted that for performance measure and reporting AOSOS will be the primary source of data software and the Operator will need to work closely with the partners on establishing procedures on the usage of AOSOS and UC Works and determining each programs capability. Robert Croom noted that UC Works will still be used for specific functions and AOSOS will be used for other case management procedures. Meredith Barracato noted that the questions that are being discussed today should be fleshed out at the operations meetings.

Jeffrey Jackson noted that until the Workforce Development Board issues its policy and those requirements then the American Job Center can move forward. Meredith Barracato noted that the NJ Department of Labor policy should be reviewed now and a discussion should be developed based on the policy. Meredith Barracato noted that the Workforce Development Board will take the operational procedures developed by the operator to customize the local policy. Meredith Barracato stressed the need for the partners to look at the state policy a develop a plan on operationalize it currently. Jeffrey Jackson noted that its important to still focus on AOSOS because that is the main database and the American Job Center will work with the partners to establish procedures.

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Chairman Brady noted he had to leave for another meeting but mentioned that the meeting discussions were the most productive he had witness and hopes they continue.

Scott Kuchinsky asked about the roll out of UC Works for the partners. Robert gave a brief update on the partners that had been trained but went on to explain their lack of staffing has caused some interruptions in further training partners. Marlene Loff noted that the first training session was in 2022 but were only given access to the system recently but will need to do a review because the training was so long ago and there was a disconnect. Dr Lisa Hiscano mentioned that access to AOSOS has big implication on how they are going to staff their programs and how this will be incorporated in the request for proposal process. Meredith Barracato noted that working on a plan for partner training should be an agenda item for the operations meeting.

Meredith Barracato summarized a recent policy from the U.S. Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 9-22, highlighting its implications for American Job Centers and Employment Services. The policy emphasized the importance of accurately tracking participant data in AOSOS for demographic and needs assessments. Meredith Barracato stressed the necessity of proper data coding and recommended direct training from the source rather than third-party sources. Key points of the policy included the significance of mental health assessments, flexibility in youth eligibility, virtual work experiences post-COVID-19, various assessments like skill and work inventory, digital literacy focus, and the need for robust supportive services such as food provision. She noted a deficiency in reporting follow-up and mentoring services, which the policy aimed to address. Meredith Barracato promised to share the full policy and summary documents from the New Jersey Department of Labor.

In one of the recent summaries from the New Jersey Department of Labor WDPS-PY23-1, Meredith Barracato discussed a U.S. Department of Labor policy focusing on Outreach. The policy emphasized affirmative outreach aimed at marginalized populations, including different sexes, races, ethnicities, religions, and individuals with disabilities. Meredith Barracato provided strategies for targeted marketing, such as sending notices to community groups, working with local nonprofits and churches, and utilizing various media channels like print, radio, influencers, blog posts, podcasts, and mobile American Job Centers. She also highlighted the importance of co-enrollment, emphasizing how partnering

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with organizations like YWCA could provide funding support for marketing and outreach efforts that might otherwise be lacking. Meredith Barracato stressed the significance of partner integration, co-enrollment, and resource leveraging to overcome funding barriers and enhance outreach effectiveness.

Meredith Barracato updated everyone on the memorandum of understanding and infrastructure funding agreement originally due in December 2023 has been extended to March. Work is ongoing, but progress is contingent upon finalizing partnerships, workflows, and the operational plan, ensuring effective collaboration among all stakeholders involved.

**New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority**

Carla Donegan began to discuss the NJ Higher Education Student Assistance Authority but the meeting was abruptly cancelled due to facility evacuation. Carla's presentation was shared with committee members.

**Committee Updates: Not available due to facility evacuation**

- **Disability Committee:**
- **Adult Education and Literacy:**
- **Youth Committee:**

**Public/Partner Comment:** No Updates were shared due to timing.

**Meeting Schedule 2024:**

- Thursday February 15, 2024 9:00am
- Wednesday May 15, 202 9:00am
- Wednesday August 21, 2024 9:00am
- Wednesday October 16, 2024 9:00am

**COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT**