

# UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD DISABILITIES COMMITTEE

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, CHAIRWOMAN

Meeting Minutes: February 6, 2024 10:00AM via Zoom

## **Committee Members**

1. Amy Wagner, Union County Department of Economic Development
2. Carolina Marin, Union County American Job Center
3. Cyndy Walsh Rintzler, In Road to Opportunities
4. Josh Bornstein, Union County Educational Services Commission
5. Manny Ramirez, Union County Bureau of ADA Compliance
6. Marc Schweitzer, NJDVRS Business Outreach Team
7. Melissa Lespinasse, Union County Department of Human Services
8. Melody Holiday, Community Access Unlimited
9. Perle Almeida, Union County American Job Center
10. Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center
11. Walter Droz, Salvation Army
12. Patricia Williams, DVRS
13. Maritza Morales, GoodWill

## **Union County Workforce Development Staff**

Meredith Barracato

Gina Tuesta

## **Meeting Summary**

### **Welcome & Introductions:**

Chairwoman Walsh- Rintzler has technical difficulties and Meredith Barracato asked everyone to put their contact information in the chat box so the Workforce Development Board can update their committee contact list. She then asked everyone to introduce themselves.

### **Approval of September 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes:**

Marc Schweitzer made a motion to approve the September 14, 2023 meeting minutes. Josh Bornstein second the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

Meredith Barracato mentioned that the agenda was being adjusted to accommodate attendees leaving early. She discussed the creation of frequently asked questions based on an employer survey conducted last August. The questions addressed concerns such as disability disclosure during interviews and access to services. Meredith Barracato proposed tailoring responses to Union County's needs and discussed resources suggested by the US Department of Labor. She explored ways to connect disabled individuals with employers, considering local programs and services. The Chairwoman contributed to the discussion, emphasizing the importance of aligning resources

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with the county's needs. Chairwoman Walsh Rintzler expressed agreement, suggesting a need to refine the questions to better suit individuals in Union County and the surrounding areas. She believed that such clarification would greatly benefit the community. Meredith Barracato suggested detailing options like the American job center for employers seeking qualified applicants with disabilities, including contact information and a brief description of their services. She proposed involving other agencies on the call to contribute to this question, seeking agreement from the committee on its potential benefits.

Melody Holiday expressed agreement, stating that it would indeed be beneficial. She mentioned that Community Access Unlimited works with individuals with disabilities seeking employment. While she primarily works with youth, she currently has an employer in Plainfield seeking someone available from 10 to 2, possibly 3 days a week, for an internship position, which she has been unable to fill at the moment.

Josh Bornstein proposed a reverse approach where employers reach out to the county through a centralized platform, possibly the job center, to provide job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. He likened this to initiatives by companies like CVS, suggesting a system where employers directly connect with county agencies supporting people with disabilities. Bornstein emphasized the need for a more targeted approach, acknowledging the diverse efforts of various agencies advocating for clients. He highlighted the potential of such a system to bridge the gap between employers and qualified candidates, suggesting it as a solution to address existing challenges. Josh Bornstein elaborated on the idea, suggesting a mechanism where employers could reach out via an advertised email address to submit job positions. These positions would then be added to the county's active listings for individuals with disabilities. Josh Bornstein proposed that employers fill out basic information outlining key requirements, ensuring that qualified candidates are forwarded to relevant agencies. He emphasized the importance of establishing such a system if it was deemed beneficial and embraced by stakeholders. Meredith Barracato asked if someone from the American Job Center could discuss Union County Works because they managed an online database that sounded like what Josh was suggesting.

Robert Croom highlighted the availability of UC Works, a platform where employers can post job listings, which are accessible to anyone using the website. He noted that organizations manage their postings on the platform, allowing them to update, remove, and display their labor market information for UC Works users. Perle Almeida supplemented Croom's statement, emphasizing the functionality of UC Works' virtual website, where employers can provide detailed information about open positions. Customers also have access to

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search for jobs based on keywords or other criteria, facilitating the matching process between employers and potential candidates.

Melody Holiday asked for the Union County Works website to be added to the chat box. Perle Almeida added the following information to the chat box, [www.ucajc.org](http://www.ucajc.org).

Cyndy Walsh Rintzler relayed Josh's chat box inquiry about the effort and time required for an employer to post on UC Works. Perle Almeida estimated that it would take around 10 to 15 minutes to post basic searchable information, depending on the level of detail desired. Josh inquired about the possibility of uploading a link to an existing posting, to which Perle indicated a need to confirm with technical staff, promising to provide the necessary information to the Chairwoman and Meredith Barracato.

Marc Schweitzer suggested connecting employers with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) as a good starting point. He mentioned that the DVR has offices in various counties, including Union County, and if their office couldn't find suitable employees, they could explore other nearby offices. Marc Schweitzer highlighted the assistance provided by the business outreach team representatives covering the entire state. He emphasized the importance of linking employers to the DVR's website, noting that the DVR is often overlooked by many, including employers.

Meredith Barracato discussed the committee's agreement to include personalized Union County FAQs, focusing on topics like job postings for employers and workplace accommodations. She emphasized the need to incorporate expertise from various county departments and individuals like Manny and Diana Calle. Meredith Barracato proposed forming a subcommittee to address specific questions collectively, ensuring detailed responses tailored to each industry. She invited interested members to participate in the subcommittee, emphasizing the targeted effort required for FAQ creation and seeking overall agreement on the initiative's direction. The following committee members noted wanting to participate in the subcommittee in the chat box;

- Melody holiday
- Carolina Marin
- Manny Ramirez
- Josh Bornstein

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**Standing Items:**

**a. PY2023 Budget:** Meredith Barracato explained that the budget was not finalized and will be available for review after the February 7, 2024 Workforce Development Board meeting.

**b. Performance Data:** Meredith Barracato discussed the standard agenda items including performance, budget, and labor market information, focusing on individuals participating in Title 1 and Title 3 programs such as the American Job Center and Wagner-Peyser programs. She highlighted issues with lagging data due to challenges in obtaining out-of-state wage data, affecting the accuracy of reports. Barracato noted that as of September thirtieth, 23 individuals were exited from the American Job Center, with 12 of them obtaining jobs six months after exit. However, she emphasized the need for current and accurate data to ensure effective evaluation and planning.

Meredith Barracato provided an overview of customer flow, focusing on participants identified through the American Job Center database as having a disability. She noted that 21 new individuals were identified in quarter one, with a trend showing a decline during the summer months but expecting a spike in January after the holidays. Barracato highlighted the expectation of increased enrollment due to co-enrollment requirements by the New Jersey Department of Labor, with more details forthcoming. She mentioned pending budget reports to be shared after the next workforce development import meeting.

**c. Unemployment Data/Labor Market Information:**

Meredith Barracato discussed the unemployment rate in Union County, noting an increase until November 2023, followed by a downward trend, which she hoped would continue, especially after the holiday season. She then shared disability statistics from the US Census Bureau, indicating around 47,000 individuals with disabilities over the age of 16 in Union County, with 27.5% employed and 69% out of the workforce. Barracato asked if these statistics matched the experiences of the committee members in their community. She also mentioned an increase in employment for people with disabilities post-COVID, attributing it to accommodations like remote work, increased hiring, and employer engagement in diversity and inclusion efforts. This positive trend reflected in a higher labor force participation rate among individuals with disabilities compared to previous years, indicating improved opportunities and accommodations in the workforce.

Meredith Barracato mentioned that every few months, the New Jersey Department of Labor provides an analysis of job postings for Union County, which would be available in the Google Drive file. She explained that the report for October through December showed the number of job postings, indicating the intensity of unique job postings. For instance, truck or trailer drivers had 208 job postings due to high demand, especially

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during the holidays. However, roles like customer sales representatives, retail sales associates, home health aides, and registered nurses remained in high demand, reflecting Union County's consistent need in the medical field. Barracato noted that industries such as hospitals, restaurants, eating establishments, and retail showed similar trends. She highlighted the importance of these reports in understanding employer demand based on seasonal fluctuations.

Meredith Barracato mentioned the ongoing efforts regarding the memorandum of understanding and infrastructure funding agreement. While the work is still in progress, the deadline for submission to the New Jersey Department of Labor has been extended for all counties until the end of March.

**Committee Comment/Updates:**

Melody Holiday shared her experiences trying to secure internships for students at medical facilities like Trinitas University and Beth Israel but expressed frustration as they seemed unresponsive to accommodating interns. She inquired about the job plan's data on the high demand for medical roles like registered nurses and healthcare administration but highlighted the need for positions like orderlies, food service workers, laundry attendants, and custodial staff within medical facilities. Holiday asked if there were any contacts or relationships established to facilitate intern placements in these roles.

Meredith asked if Marc Schweitzer or someone from the American Job Center could share some insights or experience. Marc Schweitzer expressed uncertainty about the available positions at the hospital and mentioned a Project Search cohort currently ongoing. Despite this, he admitted he didn't have specific information regarding the jobs available at the hospital. Robert Croom interjected to mention a healthcare job event happening that month and offered to share the flyer and connect the person with their business team. He noted that Carolina Marin, from their team, had been collaborating with several healthcare agencies and might provide some useful contacts.

Carolina Marin mentioned that the American Job Center had organized a job fair in October, during which three immediate hires were made by Amazon. Carolina Marin mentioned that they are still gathering feedback and numbers regarding the job fair. She acknowledged that capturing accurate numbers can be challenging but expressed hope that more people were hired as a result of the job fair. Marin encouraged anyone with information to forward it to her.

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**Meeting Schedule 2024:**

- Tuesday February 6, 2024 10:00am (Virtual)
- Tuesday April 9, 2024 10:00am (Virtual)
- Tuesday August 13, 2024 10:00am (Virtual)
- Tuesday October 8, 2024 10:00am (Virtual)

**Committee Adjournment:**