

**Public Meeting of the Union County Workforce Development Board**  
**The Hill Tavern, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033**  
**9:00AM Wednesday, February 5, 2025**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Board Members Present**

Dr. Kamran Tasharofi, Union County Healthcare Associates  
Stan Robinson Jr., SHR Marketing, LLC (**Chair**)  
Debbie Ann Anderson, Union County Department of Human Services (Karen Dinsmore)  
James R. Brady, The Savor Group  
Melynda Disla, Gateway Family YMCA  
Erich Peter, Union County Economic Development Corp (**Vice President**)  
Gwen Ryan, Union County Vocational Technical School  
Morgan Thompson, Prevention Links  
Roshan White, UA Local 24 Plumbers (Chadrick Garris)  
Dr. Margaret McMenamin, Union College of Union County, NJ (Dr. Lisa Hiscano)  
Valerie Kerrigan, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Courtney Villani, Villani Bus  
Hilary McCarron, Port Authority  
Daryl Palmieri, Union County Schools K-12  
Danielle Johnson, JCT Solutions  
Bernadette Griswold, Community Access Unlimited (Sandra Lynch)

**Board Members Absent:**

Paul Belardo, KML Carpenters  
Craig Coughlin, Kean University  
Alan Rutan, Rutan Mechanical LLC  
Teresa Soto-Vega, PROCEED  
Richard Capac, Crowne Property Management (**Secretary**)  
Timothy McConway, Steamfitters Local 475  
Curry Bucu, Trinitas Regional Medical Center  
Gloria Dunham, Qunnection Management  
Juanito Chiluisa, NJ Department of Labor

**County of Union:**

Amy Wagner, Department of Economic Development  
Antonio Rivera, Workforce Development Board  
Meredith Barracato, Workforce Development Board  
Gina Tuesta, Workforce Development Board  
Lisa Bonanno, Workforce Development Board  
Robert Croom, Union County American Job Center  
Lillian Roman, Union County American Job Center  
Nasrene Mondol, Union County American Job Center  
Jeffrey Jackson, Union County Department of Human Services

**Guests:**

Carla Donegan, NJ Higher Education Student Assistance Authority  
Reinaldo Santiago, ARC of Union County  
Isabel Jimenez, NJ Department of Labor  
Oswaldo Arango, NJ Department of Labor  
Christina Lorenzo, NJ Department of Labor  
Julienne Cherry, United Way of Greater Union County

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Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County  
Marie Alston, United Way of Greater Union County  
Bethany Freeland, United Way of Greater Union County  
Julio Sabater, Workforce Advantage  
Phillip Sabater, Workforce Advantage  
Patricia Banks, Plainfield Public Library

**I. Call to Order & Welcome**

The meeting was called to order by Stan Robinson, Chairman of the Workforce Development Board, at 9:08AM.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America was recited.

**III. Open Public Meetings Act**

Meredith Barracato read the Open Public Meetings Act Statement below into the record:

PURSUANT TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF N.J.S.A. 10:4-10 OF THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD HAS BEEN GIVEN BY MAILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE, AND BY POSTING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE YEAR 2025 ANNUAL MEETING SCHEDULE WITH THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

FURTHERMORE, ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THE LOCATION OF THIS MEETING HAS BEEN GIVEN BY PROVIDING AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOUR NOTICE TO THE NEWSPAPERS CIRCULATING WITHIN THE COUNTY OF UNION AND DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE SUCH NOTICE AND BY POSTING THE SAID NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS PRIOR TO THIS MEETING IN THE COURT HOUSE, THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD WEBSITE, AND BY FILING THE NOTICE AT LEAST FORTY-EIGHT HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING WITH OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK.

THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT STATEMENT SHALL BE ENTERED IN FULL IN THE MINUTES OF THIS MEETING.

**IV. Roll Call**

Meredith Barracato conducted the roll-call of the Union County Workforce Development Board members in attendance. Union County employees present and guests were acknowledged on the record, as reflected on page one of these minutes.

**V. Approval of the Minutes**

The minutes of the December 11, 2024 meeting were presented for a vote.

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**BOARD  
ACTION**

**James Brady** made a motion to approve the meeting minutes for December 11, 2024. Kamran Tasharofi seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. **UCWDB Report**

Director Rivera reviewed a presentation focused on the issue of unexpended funds and the need to close out and liquidate any remaining funding by the end of the fiscal year. He noted that approximately \$1.4 million was at risk of being returned to the state, based on data reported as of December 31, 2024. The data, derived from reports submitted to the state and federal government, showed that the majority of youth program funding had been allocated to the United Way of Greater Union County, a new vendor for youth services. The expectation was that these funds would be fully expended by June 30, 2025.

He addressed concerns from previous meetings regarding the recurring issue of unexpended funds. The Program Year 2023 budget allocated roughly \$1 million for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), which were managed directly by the American Job Center. A similar budget was set for Program Year 2024, with funds available until June 30, 2026. Initially, there was about \$4 million in combined funding from WIOA and WorkFirst New Jersey, with \$600,000 allocated in Program Year 2024 for training. This brought the total available for training to \$1.6 million across the two program years, with overlapping timelines.

The report highlighted the low spending rate by the American Job Center on training. In Program Year 2022-2023, no funds were spent on training during the first year. By the time Program Year 2023 was being managed, only \$202,000 had been spent, despite the previous period showing zero expenditures. The latest report showed only \$145,000 spent on training over the last 18 months. This trend had persisted over the past five to six years, prompting the need to explain the continued surplus of unspent funds. Director Rivera emphasized that the root cause was the low number of individuals being enrolled in training programs, making it a key issue requiring attention.

Chairman Robinson asked if current spending patterns are lower now than during COVID-19. Director Rivera acknowledged that spending on training had been lower than during the COVID-19 period. In 2020-2021, approximately \$250,000 was spent on training across two fiscal years. However, despite having six months remaining in the current program year, the trajectory indicated that less would be spent on training compared to that period.

In response to concerns about addressing the low expenditure, Director Rivera outlined ongoing efforts to improve spending. His office had been meeting

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regularly with partners, including the deputy county manager, to explore ways to deploy available funds more effectively. They were also collaborating with Dr Hiscano from Union College, to assess funding trajectory and identify ways to reduce bureaucratic barriers. Similar discussions were taking place with the United Way, ensuring that the onboarding process for new agreements was streamlined to maximize service delivery and fund utilization. The overall goal was to eliminate unnecessary obstacles and focus on delivering services while spending as much of the available funding as possible. Director Rivera asked Meredith Barracato to review the performance data.

Meredith Barracato's presentation provided an overview of WorkFirst New Jersey data, specifically focusing on participation rates and occupational training enrollments. The data from December 2024 indicated that Union County had a 4.6% participation rate among TANF participants. Additionally, data from FutureWorks, the state's performance tracking system, showed that between 2023 and 2024, Union County enrolled only 34 participants in occupational training. A significant concern was the high withdrawal rate, particularly among those in CDL training, which suggested that many participants were unable to complete their programs. The Workforce Development Board, career services providers, and local operators were analyzing the reasons behind these withdrawals, exploring potential barriers such as financial strain, childcare, or transportation issues.

Director Rivera clarified that over an 18-month period, only 34 individuals had been enrolled in occupational training. Given that \$1.6 million had been allocated for training, this low enrollment contributed to the significant amount of unspent funding. Board members inquired about comparisons to other counties and demographic data to better understand Union County's low enrollment numbers. While further analysis was needed, the consensus was that the data validated the trend of underutilized training funds due to low participation.

The discussion then shifted to youth performance outcomes, particularly regarding the Union County Vocational Technical School's Simon Youth Academy (SYA) program. A review of 94 participant files, including 21 SYA graduates and 73 participants from United Way's youth program, revealed significant issues with data entry and follow-up. Of the 21 SYA graduates, only nine had documented follow-ups, and no records of positive outcomes—such as college enrollment, vocational training, or employment—had been entered into the system. This resulted in low performance metrics, even though many graduates had successfully transitioned into further education or jobs. The same data entry issues extended to United Way's youth program, where 55

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participants were missing from the state's case management system, making it appear as if they had not received services.

Meredith detailed other key data management failures, including missing assessments, incomplete follow-ups, lack of case manager touchpoints, and errors in service strategy plans. Case notes were either missing, incomplete, or inconsistent with participants' actual career goals. The lack of standardized case management led to a significant gap in reported services versus actual services provided.

The Workforce Development Board in collaboration with United Way and the NJ Department of Labor aimed to implement a corrective action plan, which included standardizing case notes, properly logging activities, ensuring follow-ups were completed, and accurately entering all funded services. The goal was to ensure that the next performance review reflected actual service delivery and avoided misreporting that could negatively impact future funding.

**VII. WIOA Youth Services Provider**

Julienne Cherry opened the United Way presentation by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to expand youth services in Union County. She emphasized that United Way had shifted from a traditional model to a more direct service-driven approach, focusing on youth programs and family success. The organization adopted a data-driven strategy, prioritizing services based on community needs rather than long-standing partnerships. This approach aimed to provide holistic support, ensuring that youth facing challenges such as childcare or financial instability could access wraparound services to help them succeed.

Juanita Vargas outlined the strategic operational plan, which centered on demand-driven job placement, integrated service delivery, career pathways, and data-driven decision-making. Immediate priorities included addressing gaps in the AOSOS case management system, ensuring accurate tracking of services, and training staff on data entry and compliance. To improve service delivery, they planned to standardize procedures, enhance accountability, and implement ongoing performance evaluations. The team was also working closely with partners to streamline co-enrollment processes and improve career readiness for participants.

Marie Alston detailed the phased approach to program implementation, beginning with auditing and correcting AOSOS data while continuing existing youth services. They planned to launch career pathways, strengthen employer engagement, and develop sustainable tracking methods to measure long-term success. A strong emphasis was placed on quality control, with weekly audits and monthly reviews to prevent data inaccuracies. Additionally, they leveraged

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partnerships with education providers, financial institutions, and community organizations to expand career exploration opportunities and ensure youth had access to in-demand industries.

Bethany Freeland concluded by discussing hands-on career exposure programs, such as the Union County Career Exploration Job Tour and industry-specific hiring events. Recognizing that barriers like transportation, housing, and childcare often hinder participation, they integrated support services to improve retention. A key focus was tracking measurable skill gains and credential attainment to ensure participants were on a path to sustainable careers. Their next steps involved strengthening data management, increasing employer partnerships, and maintaining transparency to ensure youth services were impactful and effectively aligned with workforce needs.

Chairman Robinson expressed appreciation for the presentation, stating that it was both excellent and encouraging. He emphasized the importance of the data collection efforts and acknowledged the work being done to ensure accurate data entry from United Way and its partners. He was particularly pleased to hear that students were being supported in their education while also minimizing student loan burdens, which he found highly encouraging.

Chairman Robinson also noted the collaboration between United Way and adult services, highlighting how this integration made perfect sense in creating a seamless support system. He recognized the importance of aligning youth programs with broader workforce development efforts to ensure long-term success.

VIII. **Resolutions of the UCWDB**

Director Rivera transitioned the conversation to the review the resolutions. Meredith Barracato reviewed the following resolutions.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-01:  
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ADOPTING THE  
UNITED WAY OF GREATER UNION COUNTY'S WIOA YOUTH SERVICES 2025  
OPERATIONAL PLAN.**

Director Rivera confirmed that United Way's operational plan aligned with the county's strategic plan and would be key in their corrective action with the state. By presenting this plan, they aimed to address data inaccuracies and improve reporting systems.

He commended United Way's commitment to strategic planning, emphasizing that it would enhance workforce development efforts and strengthen their case

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with the state. The focus remained on resolving data issues and creating a more efficient tracking system for youth programs.

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-01**. **Erich Peter** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-01**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-02:**  
**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF PROGRAM YEAR 2023 INDIRECT COSTS.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-02**. **Gwen Ryan** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-02**. **Morgan Thompson** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-03:**  
**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF PROGRAM YEAR 2024 INDIRECT COSTS.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-03**. **Erich Peter** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-03**. **James Brady** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-04:**  
**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**AUTHORIZING COMPETITIVE CONTRACTING PROCEDURES TO PROCURE AN**  
**AMERICAN JOB CENTER PROVIDER FOR WIOA ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER**  
**CAREER SERVICES.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-04**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-04**. **Sandra Lynch** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-05:**  
**RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**  
**AMENDING RESOLUTION 2024-64 TO AUTHORIZE SPECIFIC FUNDING ALLOCATIONS**  
**FOR THE ADULT LITERACY INNOVATIONS PROGRAM.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-05**. **Morgan Thompson** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-05**. **Gwen Ryan** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano and Dr. Kamran Tasharofi abstained from Resolution No.2025-05.

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**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-06:  
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
ADOPTING THE 2025 COST ALLOCATION PLAN.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-06**. **Daryl Palmieri** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-06**. **Melynda Disla** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-07:  
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
ESTABLISHING AN AD HOC AI STRATEGY SUBCOMMITTEE.**

Chairman Robinson acknowledged the growing impact of artificial intelligence on the workforce, emphasizing that while its adoption is uneven, it is here to stay and will significantly shape future job skills and industries. He credited Antonio Rivera for proposing the creation of an AI committee to explore its effects on workforce development.

He noted that more discussions on this topic would follow as the committee's work progressed.

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-07**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-07**. **Sandra Lynch** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2025-08:  
RESOLUTION OF THE UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
AUTHORIZING THE USE OF COMPETITIVE CONTRACTING PROCEDURES FOR THE  
PROCUREMENT OF FOR WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY SERVICE PROVIDERS.**

**BOARD  
ACTION**

Chairman Robinson requested a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-08**. **James Brady** made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2025-08**. **Melynda Disla** seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**IX. American Job Center Report**

Karen Dinsmore introduced herself as the Assistant Director for Human Services, standing in for Director Debbie Ann Anderson. She presented findings from a recent state monitoring visit for Program Year 2023, noting that data entry errors had been identified in training fund allocation and equal opportunity notifications. These issues had since been corrected through file updates and staff retraining. She also highlighted efforts to strengthen partnerships, including a co-location initiative between the American Job Center (AJC) and the

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Division of Social Services to streamline services, particularly for WorkFirst New Jersey participants. Additionally, collaborations with the Plainfield Public Library and Workforce Advantage aimed to expand adult literacy programs and improve co-enrollment strategies.

Nasrene Mondol, Program Administrator for Title I Career Services, provided a data update for Quarter 2 (October-December 2024). Nearly 300 individuals completed the online orientation, with 70 determined eligible for services. She noted an increase in individual employment plans and soft skills training completions, with transportation remaining the most in-demand training sector. Projected charges for training under Program Year 23 and 24 funds totaled approximately \$400,000 across dislocated workers and adult participants in PY23 and approximately \$175,000 across dislocated workers and adult participants in PY24. Employment outcomes from job fairs had also improved, with the transportation and logistics fair increasing placements from 44 to 60 as more wage records were processed.

Dr. Lisa Hiscano reported on workforce initiatives at UCNJ, Union College of Union County NJ, noting their efforts in employer engagement, occupational training, and workforce readiness programs. The Workforce Innovation Business Center funded students in fields such as certified medical assistant and patient care technician training, with recruitment ongoing for new cohorts. She also provided an update on Title II programs, where Union College leads a consortium focused on adult literacy and ESL education. With 591 participants enrolled by December, they were on track to meet their annual goal of over 1,100 students. She emphasized efforts to co-enroll youth through partnerships with United Way.

Jeffrey Jackson, Special Projects Manager for the Department of Human Services, addressed the decline in Union County's work participation rate, which had dropped from 5.9% to 4.6%. He cited data discrepancies between social services systems, a backlog in income maintenance processing, and policy changes that delayed sanctioning non-compliant participants. Efforts to resolve these issues included working with the state, expanding Creole-speaking support staff for Haitian clients, and increasing participation in work activities.

Valerie Kerrigan from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation reported that 1,414 individuals had been served in the first quarter of the federal fiscal year, with 85 placed into employment or training and 33 successfully completing their programs. She encouraged organizations to reach out for presentations on referring individuals with disabilities for support services.

**X. Old Business**

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No Comment

XI. **New Business**

No Comments

XII. **Public Comments**

Julio Sabater, CEO of Workforce Advantage, commented on the challenges of finding CWEP sites for the Creole population but noted that many sites and slots are now available. He also mentioned a closer partnership with United Way and plans to identify CWEP sites in the Plainfield area.

XIII. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Robinson at 10:35am.

**Meeting Schedule:**

**9:00 AM, Wednesday, April 9, 2025**

**Location:**

The Hill Tavern at Galloping Hill, 3 Golf Dr, Kenilworth, NJ 07033