

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD  
(WDB)**

**7:30 a.m.**

**March 24, 2023**

**PA CareerLink® Berks County, 1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604**

**Meeting Summary**

**Members Present**

Ms. Debra Antol  
Ms. Kimberly Baskett  
Ms. Jenny Batista  
Ms. Auria Bradley  
Mr. Ryan Breisch  
Dr. Karen Campbell  
Ms. Ashley Chambers  
Mr. John DeVere (via phone)  
Mr. Michael Fischetti  
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman (via phone)  
Mr. Robert Harrop  
Ms. Crystal Houser  
Ms. Peggy Kershner  
Ms. Debra Millman  
Mr. Richard Olmos (via phone)  
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage  
Ms. Alexia Pursley  
Ms. Patricia Shermot  
Ms. Karyn Troxell  
Mr. David Turner

**Members Absent**

Mr. William Dorward  
Ms. Marianne Egolf  
Mr. Scott Mengle  
Ms. Christy Pisker  
Mr. Barry Unger

**Staff and Guests Present**

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Amber Columbo	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Employment Services Team Supervisor
Ms. Helen Konnick	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Mr. Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Mr. Larry Melf	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Pamela Shupp Menet	Berks County Director of Community & Economic Development
Ms. Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Director
Ms. Rae Ann Miller	Lancaster Co. Economic Development Company
Mr. John Biemiller	Lancaster Co. Economic Development Company

Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. David Turner, Chairperson, at 7:34 a.m.

Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting agenda with a call-in phone number was publicly advertised earlier in the week. He added that the meeting was not being recorded, but asked that board members participating by phone clearly state their names when making or seconding any motions and when making comments to assist staff with keeping the official minutes.

Mr. Turner requested a motion to approve the minutes from the December 9, 2022 meeting. Ms. Troxell so moved and Mr. Breisch seconded the motion. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Turner welcomed Ms. Crystal Houser, Acting Director for Labor and Industry's Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations, who has been appointed by the County Commissioners as our State Employment Service representative effective January 1, 2023. Ms. Houser is a ten-year United States Army Veteran. Ms. Houser shared that she has had a very diverse work history but has always been drawn to helping people achieve sustaining wages for families and enter career pathways to reach specific life goals.

Mr. Turner invited Mr. Fogarty to provide an update on the PY2021 and PY2022 Local WIOA Performance. Mr. Fogarty reported that the Commonwealth and all local areas (including Berks) met performance for PY2021, receiving the desired "green check mark". Referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter PY2022 Program Year-to-Date Results, Berks did not receive the green check mark. However, he added that Ms. Columbo is working with our contractors to review the data for accuracy and some problems in data reporting have already been corrected. He commented that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter PY2022 report will show the results. Ms. Columbo noted that the credentials attained are for customers who have already exited the programs.

Mr. Fogarty reported that terms of approximately one-third of the Board membership expire yearly. Accordingly, terms of nine of the current twenty-five Board members will expire June 30, 2023. He requested that if any of those nine members do not wish to be reappointed to please advise him by April 14. Mr. Turner thanked Board members for their continued commitment.

Mr. Turner invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee report. Ms. Noll reviewed the PY2022 Budget vs. Expenditures through January 31, 2023. As stated in her report, expenditures for the year to date are at or within budget for all programs. Ms. Noll stated that she is responsible to plan and manage the funds over a two-year useful life to make sure there is a healthy carry over to cover the projected expenditures through the first quarter of the new program year, but also to be fully expended before the end of the second year.

Ms. Noll then reviewed the PY22 Revised Budget Proposal (Revised 2/16/2023). A WIOA transfer from Dislocated Worker to Adult in the amount of \$111,111.11 was incorporated. By transferring these funds, the restrictions on the funding were removed thus allowing the

funding to be used for Adults or Dislocated Workers. There is a decrease in the operations costs due to a vacant Fiscal Coordinator position.

There being no questions on the PY22 Revised Budget Proposal, Mr. Turner asked for a motion to approve the revised budget as proposed. Ms. Kershner so moved; Ms. Bradley seconded the motion. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty reported that the County has agreed to extend the lease at the current location (Suite G) for the WDB staff through December 31, 2023. He added that WDB staff are County employees and are part of Ms. Shupp Menet's Community & Economic Development Department.

Mr. Turner invited Ms. Kershner to comment on the One Stop Oversight Committee Report. Referring to the *By the Numbers* report for the period July 2021 through December 2022, Ms. Kershner pointed out that during the first six months of the program year we saw foot traffic of 10,349 visits. 468 individuals attended orientation. 464 local businesses were served. She added that virtual services continue to be offered through the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

Ms. Kershner noted that three mini-industry job fairs were held at the CareerLink's office from February 28 through March 2, 2023 and were attended by a total of 221 job seekers.

Ms. Columbo reported that EDSI, the PA CareerLink® Berks County Operator, will be assuming the current building lease for Suite F effective June 1, 2023. Due to time constraints involved in any potential move to a new location, the PA CareerLink® Berks County will not be moving to a new location at this time.

Mr. Fogarty commented that Ms. Columbo and Ms. Noll have begun working on a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a new operator contract beginning July 1, 2024. He added that RFPs through the County must be very detailed and prepared for County approval. Ms. Noll added that preparation of an RFP usually requires four to six months' notice and coordination with the County's Purchasing Department.

Ms. Pursley complimented the positive performance updates included in the distributed report.

Mr. Turner asked how Berks County's PA CareerLink® location compares to other counties. Mr. Fogarty responded that our current location is quite accessible to job seekers and employers alike. Ample parking is available as well as public bus service to the Kutztown Road location. He added that the Northeast Reading location has a lot to offer although the location can be a bit of a challenge for the young adult youth program due to the limited transportation options available to disconnected young adults. Mr. Harrop commented that the location is a good one for employer mini events, e.g., East Penn's job fairs. Ms. Baskett added that with the OVR office being only about one mile away, the current location is very accessible for shared customers and partnership staff.

Mr. Turner invited Ms. Chambers to summarize the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee's report. Ms. Chambers reported that 59 Berks County distinct employers were represented at the Virtual Employer/Partner Symposium held March 8, 2023 with a total of 176 employer participants from around the region. She added that short videos were presented highlighting "best practice" employers. Follow up discussion from the symposium will be extremely valuable in planning for future events. Ms. Troxell commented that the energy was superb. Ms. Columbo added that a resource guide is in progress under the guidance of the Committee.

Ms. Batista was invited to comment on the Youth Committee report. She noted that the report summarizing the February 15, 2023 meeting covered a wide range of important discussion topics. She also announced that Conrad Weiser Middle School's team was recently named the outstanding overall contestant in the Manufacturers Resource Center's annual *What's So Cool About Manufacturing?* video contest which featured 27 regional middle schools. The awards ceremony was held earlier in March at the DoubleTree by Hilton, with 1,000 people in attendance.

Ms. Batista referred to several of the youth participant success stories contained in the report adding that how the youth were helped by these programs was impressive. Ms. Batista invited Mr. Stevenson to comment on the Berks County Workforce Development Board's proposal for a PY2023-2024 Business Education Partnership (BEP) Grant.

Mr. Stevenson began his comments with progress updates on the projects underway that are receiving funding under the current PY2022-2023 BEP Grant. All projects are on track to complete by the grant's December 31, 2023 expiration. Notable accomplishments to date are the great success of the recently concluded "What's So Cool about Manufacturing (WSCM)" middle-school video contest and the rising interest in the Manufacturers Resource Center's (MRC) Dream Team-Berks County K-12 student career awareness presentation activity. This year's WSCM contest garnered a record-breaking 190,000+ online public votes and the Dream Team has already connected with over 1,200 Berks students in the first half of the 2022-23 schoolyear. Mr. Stevenson expressed his appreciation to Ms. Noll for her rapid and successful efforts, on behalf of grant partners Berks and Reading/Muhlenberg Career and Technology Centers (BCTC, RMCTC), in securing PA DOL&I approval of a modification request to transfer budgeted funds to cover newly realized expenditure requirements for their June 2023 Career Camps.

Mr. Stevenson then followed with a brief synopsis of the PY2023-2024 BEP Grant proposal submitted by the WDB on March 16<sup>th</sup>. If awarded, this grant's period of performance will be June 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024. Partners in this proposal are BCTC and RMCTC in continuation of support for their annual Career Camps in June 2024, MRC in continuation of support for the 2023-24 school-year WSCM competition and the expansion of Dream Team-Berks County young professional volunteerism to increase accommodation for growing school district requests and, in support of an innovative Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) initiative to develop "Career Ready Berks High Priority Occupations Math Readiness" curricula based on employer supplied data regarding the applied math deficits they are experiencing with potential employees. Career relevant math courses will be created as an option for career-focused stu-

dents entering their school district’s twelfth-grade math programs. Total grant funds requested are \$150,000.00.

Mr. Stevenson commented on the Training and Industry Partnership Committee Report on Mr. DeVere’s behalf.

In response to the WDB’s grant proposal submitted, on February 22, 2023, the Berks County Workforce Development Board received conditional notice from the PA Department of Labor and Industry’s Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) that it had been selected for an award in the amount of \$176,155.01 under the Pennsylvania Nursing Pathway Apprenticeship Industry Partnership grant initiative. Mr. Fogarty praised the commitment of the two project partners—the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA), represented by Mr. Keith Stamm, and Reading Area Community College, represented by Dr. Stacia Visgarda, Dean of Health Professions.

Also included in the Training Committee Report was an update on Berks WDB Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) and Registered Apprenticeship (RA) funding. At the current date, \$64,805 or 85% of the funding had been obligated.

Ms. Millman asked Mr. Fogarty to comment on the WIOA 4-year Plan Modification. Mr. Fogarty replied that the writing team received great feedback from the Committee for updating key strategies. He added that after public comment and response in May, the Berks County WDB will be asked to give final approval to the plan at the regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on June 16, 2023.

Mr. Fogarty introduced Mr. John Biemiller and Ms. Rae Ann Miller of the Lancaster County Economic Development Company, guest presenters for the March 2023 State of Berks Economy. Ms. Miller’s slide presentation was as follows: (Paper copies of the slides were included in the member’s packets).

- Labor Supply in Berks County
- Employment in Berks County
- Unemployment in Berks County
- Workforce Churn – Insights from PA data
- Workforce Churn – Sector insights from US data
- Strong but uneven wage growth in Berks Co. (2022 Q3: 1-year change)
- Strong but uneven wage growth in Berks Co. (2022 Q3: 2-year change)
- Strong but uneven wage growth in Berks Co. (2022 Q3: 3-year change)
- Strong but uneven wage growth in Berks Co. (Employment)
- Strong but uneven wage growth in Berks Co. (Employment & Average Wage Earnings)
- Workforce Recovery Varies by Sector
- Berks Co. – Regional Comparison (2022 Q3) (Change from 2021 Q3)
- Berks Co. – Regional Comparison (2022 Q3) (Change from 2019 Q3)

Some key take aways noted by Ms. Miller:

- Businesses have recovered.
- Wage inflation is clear.
- There are generally positive economic trends building for Berks County relative to many other areas in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Turner commented that there seems to be fewer workers leaving their jobs. Ms. Bradley asked if there was a penalty for someone leaving a job. Mr. Fogarty replied that workers are not penalized as they once were for voluntarily leaving a job. Mr. Turner added that workers have more power to move into new positions and to be able to negotiate wages in Berks County. Mr. Fogarty added that starting wages in Berks County have risen at or above inflation over the past three years.

Mr. Fogarty provided his COO report stating that the local unemployment rate for Berks County stood at 3.9%, the lowest rate since 2000 (Y2K). Local plant closings and large layoffs in Berks County were almost nonexistent throughout 2021 and the first nine months of 2022, though such negative events have begun to occur more frequently over the past six months.

Mr. Fogarty stated that to date sixteen of twenty-five Board members have completed and returned their 2022 Statement of Financial Interests forms, well ahead of the State's May 1 deadline.

He added that following the meeting, Ms. Columbo will take interested members on a tour of the PA CareerLink® Berks County office.

Mr. Turner opened the meeting for market intelligence comments from Board members.

Ms. Troxell stated that she would love to have more time to express ways to get more employees on board in manufacturing and all areas. She added that it is important to focus on action steps with other Board members.

Mr. Fogarty replied that one way for Board members to contribute would be to join the Market Intelligence Forum held by PA CareerLink® Berks County's Business Services Team in June.

Mr. Fogarty suggested to Ms. Miller that one additional report deliverable might be to answer when Berks County is going to get back to labor market equilibrium. Ms. Miller replied that although she can't predict, it appears that Berks County seems in a very solid position.

Mr. Fogarty called for any public comment, either on the telephone or in person. There were no comments.

Mr. Fogarty reminded the Board members that the next quarterly meeting will be held on June 16, 2023 at 7:30 a.m. vis MS Teams.

Mr. Turner asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Kershner so moved; Ms. Antol seconded the motion. On roll call, all members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.