



WDB Meeting Minutes (via MS Teams)

December 13, 2024

7:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.

Members Present

Kimberly Baskett (MS Teams)
Jenny Batista (MS Teams)
Ryan Breisch (MS Teams)
Dr. Karen Campbell (MS Teams)
Ashley Chambers (MS Teams)
Marianne Brown Egolf (MS Teams)
Michael Fischetti (MS Teams)
Dayana Groff (MS Teams)
Kristina Houck (MS Teams)
Crystal Houser (MS Teams)
Peggy Kershner (MS Teams)
Cindy Line (MS Teams)
Debra Millman (MS Teams)
Brian Noecker (MS Teams)
Dr. Michael Stauffer (MS Teams)
Alexia Pursley (MS Teams)
Patricia Shermot (MS Teams)
Nic Thomas (MS Teams)
Karyn Troxell (MS Teams)
Barry Unger (MS Teams)

Members Absent

William Dorward
Mark Pinkasavage
Christy Pisker

WDB Staff Present

Dan Fogarty
Amber Columbo
Megan Noll
Rory Stevenson
Alycia Arters
Jesenia Santos

Guests Present

Pamela Menet	County of Berks Director of Economic Development
Derek Harris	County of Berks Economic Development Coordinator
David Genaro	Equus Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems Inc – Regional Director
Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County Employment Services Team Supervisor
Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Supervisor
David Dopkin	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Assistant Regional Director
Yanimer Serrano	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Rapid Response
Nathaniel Beckham	PA Department of Labor & Industry
Larry Melf	PA CareerLink® Berks County Operator
Melissa Lewis	County of Berks IT
Carl Long	County of Berks IT

This meeting was held virtually through Microsoft Teams on December 13, 2024. Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. WDB Chairperson, Ms. Jenny Batista called the meeting to order at 7:33 a.m.

Ms. Batista called for a motion to approve the September 20, 2024, board meeting minutes. Ms. Kristina Houck voiced a motion to approve, and Mr. Barry Unger seconded. All members voted their approval with no recorded abstentions or further discussion needed.

Ms. Batista informed the members that in this virtual environment, she has asked Mr. Fogarty to help her facilitate the meeting. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being recorded for minutes purposes only and the recording would be deleted after their completion. Board members were asked to state their names when commenting, making, or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

I. Executive Committee Report

Mr. Fogarty informed the board of an error that was made during last week's executive committee minutes. Under the by-law's discussion, it was incorrectly stated that Deb Millman directly assisted with the by-laws. While Ms. Millman did review them as part of the committee, it was Ashley Chambers and Peggy Kershner who in fact served on the working group that reviewed the by-laws. A correction will be made on the last executive committee meeting minutes.

Mr. Fogarty reminded the board that the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (PADOL) released a revised local governance policy in June 2024 which required a revision to all local WDB by-laws. A focus of this revised policy was the inclusion of board committees into local WDB by-laws and an expectation that all by-law revisions be effective as of January 1st, 2025. Following review of existing committees, a recommendation was made to expand the Executive Committee to include the financial oversight responsibilities and eliminate the Finance Committee beginning January 1st, 2025. In addition, the One-Stop Oversight Committee and the DEI Committees are recommended to be combined to form the Access and Opportunities committee as agreed to by the existing committee chairs, Peggy Kershner and Ashley Chambers. Both chairs have also graciously agreed to co-chair the Access and Opportunities committee beginning January 1st, 2025.

The County's Solicitor's office was provided the by-laws at the end of September and conducted a full review. All recommendations from the County Solicitor's office were incorporated into the final version. Mr. Fogarty offered a special thank you to Assistant Solicitor Alexa Antonavich for her assistance and feedback on the by-laws. As part of the solicitor's review, it was recommended that the board no longer elect a treasurer or secretary. The by-laws must now list all our committees, so if the board decides to make any changes, we must revisit the by-laws moving forward. We recommend expanding the Executive Committee to include the responsibilities of the Finance Committee. Starting in 2025, our single executive committee will handle those responsibilities. Another change recommended is to bring together the One Stop Oversight committee and DEI committee. The new name is the Access and Opportunities committee. The mutual responsibilities of these two committees are now under one and we really appreciate Peggy Kershner and Ashley Chambers' willingness to maintain a WDB Chair and Vice-Chair. Jenny Batista will be the WDB Chair and Karen Troxell will be the Vice Chair of the full WDB as both were elected at the September 2024 meeting. Another change in the membership section includes a maximum of five 3-year terms. It was confirmed with the solicitor's office to be a good practice.

Mr. Fogarty requested a motion to approve the by-laws as presented. Dr. Karen Campbell moved to approve the by-laws, and Ryan Breisch seconded the motion. All members voted their approval with no recorded abstentions or further discussion needed.

Mr. Fogarty requested approval from the board to award our post pandemic Talent Demographic Study Contract to Thomas P Miller Associates (TPMA) in the amount not to exceed \$120,000. Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve. Peggy Kerschner voiced a motion to approve the award, and Dr. Mike Stauffer seconded the motion. All members voted their approval with no recorded abstentions or further discussion needed.

Mr. Fogarty invited WDB Assistant Director Amber Columbo to comment on the Berks WDB Local Oversight Plan. Ms. Columbo began by reporting that the oversight plan was recently updated specifically on how to conduct our internal risk assessment of our contractors. This is a combined responsibility between WDB program and fiscal staff. It identifies the oversight, administrative, fiscal, and program responsibilities listed in all categories that we are conducting locally. This risk assessment is completed at the end of each program year, and it is primarily focused on how our contractors are performing fiscally to ensure we are compliant. Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve. Ms. Baskett moved to approve the oversight plan as presented, and Ms. Pursley seconded the motion. All members voted their approval with no recorded abstentions or further discussion needed.

Ms. Columbo next reviewed the PY2024 Q1 performance report where neither state of Pennsylvania nor the County of Berks received a green check mark signifying satisfactory performance. The driver for not receiving the green check mark at both our local and state levels was low measurable skills gain, a performance measure required for adults and young adults enrolled in the respective programs. Ms. Columbo continues to work closely with the Title I Youth provider on a quarterly basis in efforts to improve performance results for Q2.

II. Finance Committee Report

Ms. Batista invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee's report. Referring to the PY 2024 Budget vs. Expenditure Report through October 31, 2024, Ms. Noll reported that expenses are within budget. Due to accommodating a larger summer youth program, the TANF Youth contract is projecting to be over expended. However, this budget will balance itself out by the end of June and is not a financial concern.

Next, Ms. Noll proposed a revision to the PY 2024 WDB budget that includes the following changes: (1) a transfer of \$150,000 from Dislocated Worker to Adult funds, (2) an increase of \$1,900 for higher than expected second increments of Adult and Dislocated Worker funds, (3) an addition of \$149,000 for the Business Education Partnership (BEP) grant award, (4) an increase in direct charges by \$5,000 for kiosks and \$1,400 for additional youth WorkKeys assessments, (5) an increase to the out-of-school youth services contract to replace computers and increase staff wages to be competitive in the local market, and (6) an increase of \$200,000 to the career building training RFP budget to accommodate the potential for two awards of \$250,000 each.

Mr. Barry Unger moved to approve the PY 2024 revised budget as presented, and Dr. Campbell seconded the motion. All members voted to approve the PY 2024 revised budget except for one abstention from Peggy Kershner.

III. Training & Industry Partnership Report

Mr. Fogarty referred the board to a Career Building Workforce Training Opportunity Statement of Work for review. As recommended by the Training & Industry Partnership Committee, upon WDB approval, public notice of a Request for Proposals (RFP) aimed at providing funding to community providers/organizations to develop and deliver qualified training, including pre-apprenticeships, that leads to employment in manufacturing, healthcare, construction, agriculture, and food production occupations in PY2025, will be made by The County of Berks. We seek proposals with a one-year period of performance, with the potential for awardees exhibiting successful outcomes to be eligible for a one-year extension. Mr. Fogarty reminded everyone that any member of the board that would have an interest in submitting a proposal should abstain from the vote, and even in the discussion. Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve the Statement of Work, and a vote was motioned for by Ashley Chambers and seconded by Nic Thomas. The motion was passed after expressed abstentions from Alexia Pursley, Cindy Line, Peggy Kershner, Barry Unger, and Ryan Breisch. Dayana Blandon was a non-vote due to technical issues.

Ms. Pursley conducted the report out of the November 21st T&IP committee meeting as follows:

Grants Updates - Penn State University Berks was awarded a Good Jobs Challenge (GJC) grant from Philadelphia Works to expand the practical nursing program. The funds will be used for healthcare related training equipment and to provide scholarships. Reading Area Community College (RACC) is also utilizing a capital improvement grant in expansion of the Schmidt Training and Technology Center facilities to include new equipment.

Industry Sector Updates:

Healthcare –

The Greater Reading Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership (IP) met September 26, 2024, at RACC with 22 individuals in attendance. There is now a Healthcare IP web page on the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) website. The website has updated information regarding employment and educational programs.

Construction –

I-LEAD was awarded a Good Jobs Challenge Grant from Philadelphia Works to assist with their building trades pre-apprenticeship program. The program was developed in collaboration with the IBEW local union 743.

Manufacturing –

An in-person Advanced Manufacturing Industry Partnership meeting at Brentwood Industries took place on September 10th. State Senator Judy Schwank was in attendance. A robust tour of the Brentwood facility followed the meeting.

The GRCA held its 10th Annual Greater Reading Manufacturing Summit event at RACC's Miller Center for the Arts on October 30, 2025, with over 170 individuals in attendance. A Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Mr. Bob Harrop, a long-time member of the WDB, in appreciation of his many years of involvement in the Berks manufacturing community. Ms. Lisa Riggs from Team PA was the keynote speaker. Ms. Riggs spoke on key areas of State focus, including automation, supply chain, and translating University-led R&D into real world applications. There was a panel discussion on designing an organizational talent pipeline and succession planning followed by multiple breakout sessions focusing on adopting automation, team engagement, and robotics for attendees to choose from.

IV. One Stop Oversight Committee Report

Peggy Kershner gave an overview of the 'By the Numbers' report from July 2024 through September 2024. The second page of the report gives a comparison review from last year's Quarter 1 progress. The use of UC Connect by unemployment compensation (UC) applicants is up 61% from the same period in PY2023 while overall UC calls are down. The foot traffic, RESEA, and the welcome orientation numbers are up. The virtual services number is way up but this may be due to currently better record keeping than before. Businesses served is down a bit for the first quarter as compared to the previous year. The Fall job fair held on October 14th at the Double Tree in Reading was a great success, with 1,096 job seekers and 89 exhibitors. Positive feedback was received from both employers and attendees.

V. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee

Ashley Chambers informed the board that the committee met last month to review the distribution progress for the employer guide to increase inclusiveness of individuals with disabilities in employment. The committee then discussed reasons for combining the DEI Committee with the One Stop Committee. The combined committee name is The Access and Opportunities Committee.

VI. Planning Committee Report

Deb Millman reported that the Planning Committee met on September 19th and November 14th. The committee is focused on keeping the progress going in the preparation of the four-year plan. Completion of the first draft is scheduled for January 9th, 2025, with a submission date of February 21, 2025, to Labor and Industry. Mr. Fogarty informed the board of the helpful role the planning committee partook with the Thomas P Miller report.

VII. COO Report

Mr. Fogarty, WDB COO, presented his COO report.

Mr. Fogarty reported that the local unemployment rate continues to remain historically low at 3.4 - 3.5 percent for the past 20 months. Some factors that contribute to that are a very low number of plant closings or large layoffs and a low number of people looking for jobs. Local workers have benefited from steady 4% year over year increases in average weekly raises.

VIII. Market Intelligence Discussion

Following the COO Report, Mr. Fogarty opened the market intelligence discussion.

Mr. Stauffer from Berks Career and Technology (BCTC) shared the ongoing expansion of their health occupations program. Healthcare is some of BCTC's most popular programs with a waitlist of 50-70 students. To help with the demand BCTC is adding a 4th instructor to the healthcare occupations program. The center will be renovating and expanding its current space for the program by next year.

Mr. Noecker informed the board of steady maintenance hires at East Penn Manufacturing in the last couple months. The company needs electricians, electro-mechanical technicians, and experienced machine operators to work on the manufacturing floor at East Penn. Retention numbers continue to improve.

Mr. Thomas reported that Gage Personnel had a very strong year in 2024. The staffing agency has seen some early signs for a good start to 2025. The company trended ahead in their volume accounts over last year. That's a sign of how great they are doing with hiring and keeping people at work.

Mr. Fischetti shared that, in the last 18 months, about 900 people across the United States were added to the Reading Truck workforce, including about 300 individuals resulting from manufacturing acquisitions in Texas and Kentucky. Of these 900 individuals, 35% were added to the manufacturing workforce here in Reading. The Reading plant will soon grow from 555 to 1,050 employees. Bookings are down 20% in Q1. Reading Truck is challenged with finding experienced welders, experienced machine operators and individuals in maintenance. The company benefits from having an inhouse welding school and offers training internally.

Mr. Unger reported having one of the best years ever in 2024! Construction Trades enrollment numbers continue to increase for Thaddeus Stevens, Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), and local career & technical centers (CTC's) fueling potential candidate pipelines for Registered Apprenticeship programs. Mr. Unger shared that his company is currently working on the new STEM high school located in Reading on N. 9th St at the former Reading Outlet Center. He hopes to have the WDB members tour the renovated building

sometime in the Spring 2025. The surrounding views are beautiful. Vision Mechanical had an acquisition this year that brought approximately 12 new employees into the company. Mr. Unger stated that, currently, Vision Mechanical has 1 open position and is looking to bring another 4-5 apprentices on in 2025. Mr. Unger concluded by saying that he believes having a good culture, nice benefits, and a good salary all contribute to successful recruitment and retention.

- IX. **Public Comment** – Mr. Fogarty then asked for any comment from the public. There was no public comment presented.

CY2025 Meetings - The next 2025 Berks Workforce Development Board Meeting will be held virtually via MS Teams on **Friday, March 21, 2025 @ 7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.**

Following a motion to adjourn, Ms. Batista announced that the meeting officially adjourned at 8:59 am.