



## **WDB Meeting Minutes (via MS Teams)**

**March 21, 2025**

**7:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.**

### **Members Present**

Kimberly Baskett  
Jenny Batista  
Peggy Kershner  
Cindy Line  
Ashley Chambers  
Kristina Houck  
Nic Thomas  
Karyn Troxell  
Debra Millman  
Alexia Pursley  
Patricia Shermot  
Brian Noecker  
Michael Fischetti  
William Dorward

### **Members Absent**

Barry Unger  
Mark Pinkasavage  
Christy Pisker  
Ryan Breisch  
Dr. Karen Campbell  
Marianne Brown Egolf  
Michael Stauffer  
Dayana Groff  
Crystal Houser

### **WDB Staff Present**

Dan Fogarty  
Amber Columbo  
Megan Noll  
Rory Stevenson  
Jesenia Santos

### **Guests Present**

Pamela Menet	County of Berks Director of Economic Development
Nicholas Shirk	PA CareerLink® Berks County – Site Administrator
David Genaro	Equus Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
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
Melissa Lewis	County of Berks Information Systems
Carl Long	County of Berks Information Systems

This meeting was held virtually through Microsoft Teams on March 21, 2025. Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. WDB Chairperson, Ms. Jenny Batista, called the meeting to order at 7:34 a.m.

Ms. Batista called for a motion to approve the December 13, 2024, board meeting minutes. Ms. Patricia Shermot voiced a motion to approve, and Ms. Kim Baskett 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 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**

Ms. Batista provided a reminder that under our new by-laws the executive committee has assumed fiscal responsibilities from the former finance committee.

Ms. Batista then invited Ms. Noll to review the financial reports. Ms. Noll began by reviewing the PY 24 WDB Budget v. Expenditure report through January 2025. Based on current expenditures, WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Services, Business Services, and Community Outreach are projected to under expend their current contract budgets. As a result, each of these subcontractors has submitted requests to reduce their contract budgets, which will be presented in the revised budget proposal.

Next, Ms. Noll presented a revision to the PY2024 WDB budget that includes the following changes: (1) a decrease of \$19,000 from EARN performance funds due to an accounting system error from 2015 that was corrected, (2) the reduction of WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Services, Business Services, and Community Outreach as mentioned earlier, (3) a WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Services contract transfer of \$75,000 from existing Dislocated Worker funds to Adult funds to meet anticipated customer demand for training, and (4) a state WIOA transfer of \$125,000 from Dislocated Worker funds to Adult funds .

Mr. Fogarty facilitated a motion to approve the PY2024 revised budget as presented, as well as asking for a recorded vote. Nic Thomas made a motion to approve, and Ashley Chambers seconded. All members voted to approve the PY2024 revised budget, except for one abstention from Peggy Kershner. A recorded vote was entered in the Microsoft Teams chat function.

Ms. Columbo reviewed the PY2024 Q2 performance report and the WDB did receive the “green check mark” signifying satisfactory performance. Ms. Columbo continues to work closely with both Title I providers to ensure accurate reporting. Ms. Columbo informed the board of an adjusted result provided for PY2023 from the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA). These results are provided 6 months after the program ends; these are adjusted results which help account for the barriers of the participants being served over the program year. Berks achieved the green check mark for PY2023.

## **II. Planning Committee Report**

Deb Millman reminded the board that our local Industry Sectors were reviewed, prioritized, and approved in June 2024. Priority A). Manufacturing & Healthcare, Priority B). Construction, and Priority C). Agriculture and Educational services were the first step to begin the four-year planning cycle, leading into the plan goals of: Building on our strengths, engaging with employers in talent retention and development, no talent left behind, connecting young adults, and future talent pipeline, school age population, career readiness, and career technical education.

Our proposed plan was submitted in late February to the Department of Labor and Industry and feedback was subsequently provided back to us for some relatively minor additional revisions. Overall, this important project remains on track.

The post-pandemic demographic study was awarded to TPMA, with a full report anticipated by the September 2025 board meeting.

## **III. Training & Industry Partnership Report**

Alexia Pursley reported that the Committee met on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Committee member Marguerite Kline, HR Manager – Berks Heim and a member of the Pennsylvania WDB’s Healthcare Workforce Committee, shared that committee’s report detailing numerous issues negatively impacting the statewide Nurse Aide (NA) vendor-administrated testing system, preventing, or delaying candidates’ ability to be certified as registered Nurse Aides. This is a statewide issue impacting our ability to qualify trained candidates for this critical high priority occupation (HPO). Mr. Stevenson commented that the PA WDB report will be shared with Greater Reading Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership (IP) attendees for feedback at the upcoming March 12 quarterly IP meeting.

Rory Stevenson shared that the “Career Building Workforce Training” RFP that was issued in January 2025 by the county resulted in four proposals submitted for evaluation. One to two T&IP committee members are welcomed to join WDB staff in reviewing the proposals. Mr. Fogarty invited those committee members, willing and available to join the review committee, to inform WDB staff of their availability, reminding all to take into consideration any possible conflict of interest that might affect candid participation in the review process to abstain from volunteering. The review committee will evaluate how each proposal aligns with RFP requirements, including proposed training outcomes, proposal budget assessment, and a “Best and Final Offer” review. Each proposal will be ranked on a scale of one to five, with the two highest ranked proposals selected for contracted delivery. The review committee’s goal is to be completed with the evaluation process by mid-May. Ms. Columbo added that this is a tentative timeline that is subject to change, but the goal is for two awards to be made with project start dates effective July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025.

Next, Mr. Stevenson informed committee members that the incumbent worker training has been slow regarding utilization and obligation of Incumbent Worker Training/Registered Apprentice (IWT/RA) funds thus far in PY2024. Mr. Stevenson reported that since the December committee meeting, two new IWT applications have been approved, increasing obligated IWT funds for the program year to approximately 60% of the allocated \$100K. During the same period, processing of additional applicant invoicing for IWT funds reimbursement has risen actual PY2024 IWT expenditures to ≈35%.

#### **IV. Access & Opportunities Committee Report**

Ashley Chambers referred the board to the “By the Numbers” report year-to-date through December 2024 and provided a brief update. All results are exceeding those of the similar period a year ago except that UC customer requests are down, which is a positive development.

Peggy Kershner reported on the upcoming PA CareerLink® Spring Job Fair scheduled for April 21<sup>st</sup> from 1pm until 5pm at the Double Tree by Hilton located in downtown Reading. The Business Services Team has 73 employers registered to date. A series of workshops will take place at this event, such as mock interviews and free transportation resources. Connections Work is also having a career fair on March 31<sup>st</sup> at the Double Tree by Hilton from 9am until 12pm. Volunteers will be on hand to help job seekers fill out applications and assist with general job readiness coaching. Connections Works anticipates over 30 area employers will be in attendance. These employers offer second chance employment opportunities for individuals in the community who are on probation or who have had past involvement in the criminal justice system.

#### **V. Youth Committee Report**

Ms. Columbo reminded the board that the youth committee continues to focus on the growing Disconnected Young Adult Population. Terri Hill from the Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) and Stacy Dunleavy from the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) have been involved in coordinating with

local school districts to identify undecided seniors who do not have a plan upon graduation. Dr. Karen Campbell at Albright College is graciously arranging space at no charge for the event to be held on Tuesday May 13, 2025, from 10am-2pm. Currently, we have 9 out of the 18 school districts participating and providing transportation for their students, 18 employers and local colleges will be in attendance such as Albright, Alvernia, Penn State Berks, RACC, and Kutztown. In addition, a PA CareerLink® Representative will have a table to provide program information, such as training opportunities in high demand sectors.

## **VI. COO Report**

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

Mr. Fogarty reported that the Berks County local population continues to grow and is expected to have more than 440,000 residents in 2030. He stated that Berks had no large layoffs in 2024 and only one local establishment reporting layoffs to date in 2025. DeMet's Candy in Mohnton announced its plant closing at the end of May impacting 55 employees. Our regional Rapid Response Coordinator has already lined up meetings with the employees in both English and Spanish. These meetings, to be held in May prior to the layoffs, can make a big difference in getting people transitioned to good opportunities in the current job market.

## **VII. Market Intelligence Discussion**

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

Mr. Noecker reported that he is seeing better stability within the workforce. East Penn Manufacturing has been proactively planning for any impact tariffs may cause them. The company has raw materials that come from Canada and battery building relationships in Mexico. Discussions and understanding the status of tariffs and what impact they may have has been a focal point in recent conversations.

Mr. Thomas shared that Gage Personnel, with clients in Berks and Lancaster County, has noticed some employer hesitation with new projects. Many projects have been placed on pause due to uncertainty regarding some materials coming from Canada or from overseas.

Ms. Pursley reported that she has not seen or heard of any job cuts or a freeze on open positions at Arkema. However, she has seen significant slowdown with capital projects across the nation, as well as some scaling back on internships.

Ms. Houck shared that customer demand for service work at Pfeiffer's Machine remains robust. She has noticed that the company is currently quoting a lot but has not received as many awarded contracts.

Mr. Fogarty provided an update from Barry Unger who was unable to attend the meeting but sent an email with some feedback to share with the Board. Mr. Unger wrote that he has noticed some concerns around pricing due to new tariffs, but due to the amount of current work the company has projected for 2025 it has not had a major impact. Vision Mechanical continues work on the new STEM High School Academy in Reading and looks forward to more work with new retail complex at the former Glidden site in Reading.

Ms. Troxell from Penske vocalized concern and uncertainty in conversations with colleagues. She has been in talks with HR team members and operational partners to become ambassadors of HR to help people with real fears and concerns have an outlet for expression. The focus has been to not just listen, but to provide consistent talking points and being able to provide responses that create some

consistency throughout the company. A focus on partnering has been reviewed with the benefits team for mental health resources that the company can share with their staff members.

Ms. Kershner informed the board that Connections Work has lost a substantial amount of federal funding that was expected to be used towards the end of the year. Connections Work continues to focus on serving marginalized individuals with multiple barriers. She expressed growing concerns about not having the resources necessary to provide enough support required by the less-work ready individuals that they are seeing in the community.

Ms. Baskett reported that the changes on the federal level with the proposed dissolution of the U.S. Department of Education has been particularly challenging. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs in every state are primarily funded through the U.S. Department of Education. OVR in Pennsylvania received flat funding this fiscal year and anticipates flat funding again next fiscal year. OVR recently reinstated its “order of selection” to prioritize limited funding to service the neediest people in terms of job readiness and degree of disability.

VIII. **Public Comment** – Mr. Fogarty then asked for any comment from the public. There was no public comment presented. He noted that we had four attendees via YouTube present for the meeting.

**CY2025 Meetings** - The next 2025 Berks Workforce Development Board Meeting will be held virtually via MS Teams on **Friday, June 20, 2025 @ 7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.**

*Following a motion to adjourn, Ms. Batista announced that the meeting officially adjourned at 9:03 am.*