

SE MN Workforce Development Board

November 7, 2019, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Workforce Development, Inc.
Rochester, Minnesota

Minutes

Members Present: Jinny Rietmann (Executive Director), Laura Link, Cheryl Gustason, Jeff Custer, Rick Gnemi, Geoff Smith, Jim Kingsley, Phil Sayles, Chad Kleist, Marvin Urias, Jeffery Boyd, Chersten Keilor, Diane Simon, Guy Finne, Nadine Holthaus, Rhonda Toquam, Brian Cashman, Vicki McKay, Aaron Benike, Dee Sabol, Jim Root, Shelly Caldwell

Others Present: Bryce Bjork, Susan Boehm, Sonji Davis, Becky Zoubek, David LeGarde, Jakki Trihey, Beth Christensen, Ehsannah Paw, Jody Schaber, Emily Wessing (note taker)

SUBCOMMITTEE STRUCTURE UPDATE (1:00 – 2:30 PM)

Ms. Rietmann opened the discussion with an overview of the revised subcommittee structure finalized in October in response to the August 15th strategic planning session feedback. Ms. Rietmann explained that we have retained the MaxAbility Employment, Salute Southern MN Veterans Network, and Previously Incarcerated Individuals subcommittees; while they will not meet on board meeting days, they are very successful on their own and will continue to be an integral part of our structure going forward. We have reworked the sector subcommittee titles to try to encompass more cross-sector engagement and try to address our priorities at a larger level into three topic areas – Employer Engagement, Emerging Workforce/Youth, and Career Pathways. These will meet on an ongoing basis on board meeting days. It was decided that it is important to provide a foundation of what is currently happening in these subcommittees – what are the programs and services that are already successful? With this baseline, we can move forward with new initiatives.

Overview of Current Subcommittee Objectives

Career Pathways – Jakki Trihey and Beth Christensen provided an overview of the existing Career Pathways programs. Currently, Bridges to Careers encompasses three program areas – healthcare, public sector, and maintenance tech. All three of these programs were started because of employer demand and student demand. They are designed to address the demands of students, job seekers and employers. We have served over 500 students with over 440 industry recognized credentials. These credentials range from CNA to phlebotomy, hemodialysis, digital literacy, customer service, and more. We've had over 480 individuals be employed at over 50 employers. There are multiple entry and exit points that provide for extra training and certifications for higher level employment. The Bridges to Public Sector program provides opportunities for dynamic careers in healthcare that are not tied to direct patient care. The Bridges to Maintenance Technician program is brand new and provides options for those who want to work hands-on, not within healthcare or an office setting. There was a brief discussion clarifying aspects of the programming, eligibility, etc. Other WDI Career Pathways training programs including manufacturing – both in Rice/Steele Counties, and in Goodhue/Wabasha/Houston counties.

Employer Engagement – Sonji Davis provided an overview of the existing Employer Engagement programs. This subcommittee stemmed from the conversations around wanting to discuss best practices across sectors, groups and the inability to converse, share updates and best practices, etc. The mission of this committee will be to work together, network, recruit, grow and allow our cross-sector engagement to share ideas, best practices, and develop strategies for addressing the workforce shortage in our region. Various industries come together to brainstorm, develop strategies, educate on the changing dynamics of the workforce, and more. We've developed the Employer Outreach Specialists group as well to inform on these programs and services. We will examine the current barriers our job seekers are experiencing and look at ways for employers to address these. We will try to make connections between youth and employers and creating employers of choice. There was a brief discussion clarifying aspects of the programming, eligibility, etc.

Emerging Workforce – David LeGarde provided an overview of the existing Emerging Workforce programs. We consider youth anywhere between the ages of 15 and 24. We generally serve at-risk youth that are overcoming multiple barriers. We have a team of planners that cover the 10-county area that work with youth on career exploration, assessments, essential and soft skills planning, communication, workplace behavior, job shadows, worksite visits, work experiences, postsecondary scholarship programs, etc. Priorities for this committee include enhancing communication between high schools, colleges and employers, career exploration beginning at the middle school level, parent education on career and educational opportunities, alignment of available jobs and jobs of the future with the available workforce, labor market information research, and connecting out-of-school students with their realities and opportunities, particularly in the age range of 18-24, and utilizing success data to entice incoming groups and participants. There was a brief discussion clarifying aspects of the programming, eligibility, etc.

Ms. Rietmann presented a series of questions for consideration for these subcommittees going forward. These questions will be sent via email for consideration at the December meeting. Ms. Rietmann noted that we would like to have these new committee members finalized by January.

Full Board Meeting (2:30 PM)

A quorum was present, and Cheryl Gustason called the meeting to order. Introductions were made. **Cheryl Gustason motioned for consent of the November agenda; Jeff Custer moved, Nadine Holthaus seconded, and the motion passed. Cheryl Gustason motioned for consent of the October minutes; Rick Gnemi moved, Diane Simon seconded, and the motion passed.**

Ms. Rietmann provided background on Sheldon Steele. **Cheryl Gustason motioned for seating of Sheldon Steele, new Workforce Development Board member; Aaron Benike moved, Rick Gnemi seconded, and the motion passed.**

Program Reports

Management Committee – Laura Link

- Laura Link shared the *Management* report. She gave a review of the fiscal report, noting that since the last report, the WESA (Women's Economic Security Act) grant came through – we will receive \$201,000 over the next two years. The Southeast Asian Economic Disparities Relief grant came through as well. Everything is tracking where it should be, there are a couple of one-time payments that are reflecting a higher percentage but will level off. We voted and approved the 2020 benefits for Workforce Development, Inc. For the dislocated worker report, Associated Milk Producers is going out of business; employee layoffs began on November 2nd and will conclude with full facility closure on February 2nd. For the youth report, Stacy Mason is the new youth career planner for Albert Lea and Austin. WDI has been awarded a Youth Innovation Programming grant in the amount of \$90,000 over two years, beginning January 1, 2020.

One Stop Operating Partners – Brian Cashman

- Brian Cashman shared the *One Stop* report. We did not have a quorum or action items. The Post Bulletin job fair was held recently, with about 65 employers and 75 job seekers. Vocational Rehabilitation has a new director coming on board. Bridges to Career has just received a grant, and the International Medical Group program has lapsed, but we're hoping to secure new funding soon.

Taskforce and Work Group Reports

- Ms. Rietmann provided an overview of last month's subcommittee structure update. Earlier today, we shared current initiatives for each of the new three groups – Career Pathways, Emerging Workforce, and Employer Engagement. We are excited to move forward and are hoping to secure commitment from members in each of these groups by January.
- Guy Finne shared the *MaxAbility* report. International Day of Celebration of People with Disabilities is on December 2nd, and we have begun promoting on social media, via press releases, etc. The team is working hard to plan for our 2020 networking meetings. There was a brief discussion regarding the importance of mental health prioritization for employers and the workforce.
- Guy Finne shared that *Salute Southern MN Veterans Network* is reevaluating their initiatives for the future at this time.
- Susan Boehm shared the *Previously Incarcerated Individuals* report. Since this subcommittee meets outside of board meeting days, the next meeting will be Tuesday, November 19th at 2:00pm. We are also reorganizing our initiatives and are looking for a champion from the board at this time.

Assessment Policy Finalization – Beth Christensen

Beth Christensen provided background on assessment policy. WDI has policy and guidance letters that direct the training of our career planners. We frequently use assessments that require state-guided policies for monitoring purposes. **Cheryl Gustason motioned for approval of the assessment policy letter; Diane Simon moved, Rick Gnemi seconded, and the motion passed.**

Employer Profile – Aaron Benike, Benike Construction

Program Spotlight: Southeast Asian Economic Disparities Relief – Ehsannah Paw and Beth Christensen

Director's Report – Jinny Rietmann

Ms. Rietmann shared the director's report. We have a fully seated board with Sheldon's approval, with 33 members. At the federal level, our federal administration has been working on budget negotiations and there is still potential for a government shutdown. We are waiting for budget negotiations to be at the forefront of the conversation, meanwhile the House is on recess this week as well. The higher education reauthorization has taken much of the focus; at \$400 billion higher education plan is in the works currently. Tuition-free community college, opportunities for PELL grants and eligibility for grants, increasing student aid, expanding public service, loan forgiveness and more are options, but is still at the negotiation level. National Apprenticeship Week is coming up, in its fifth year nationwide. Our board could look at supporting this next year. We've had several policy revisions in order to assist farmers in our region. Since then, the conversations have multiplied as we are being featured in the news and momentum is gaining in the region. Minnesota has the highest workforce participation rate for women in the country at 81%. Ms. Rietmann recently finished an executive director bootcamp and presented a capstone project surrounding the employer outreach specialist group. It was a great opportunity to connect with national

representatives as well. The board portal is upcoming, it will likely roll out in December or January; Nate Nordstrom from Brandhoot will present an update on this in January. We are getting a new website as well, and are revamping our marketing materials, reevaluating communication strategies, updating social media, integrating email marketing, and more. Additionally, we are reevaluating the company culture and feel of our offices and ensuring that we portray a welcoming and open environment. Finally, we had two regional meetings recently – one for the regional board in October. Cheryl Gustason shared that she feels optimistic about the future, with many new members coming in. Additionally, there was a staff-level meeting for the regional board, discussing collaboration opportunities with training, manufacturing, etc.

Other Area Activity/Upcoming Meetings

- December 5th – 2:30 p.m.
 - Topics for December:
 - Labor Market Information (Mark Schultz)
 - Best Practice: Steele County Works
- January 9th – 2:30 p.m.
 - Topics for January:
 - Apprenticeships
 - The Construction Trades and You? For Farmers! – November 14th

Motion to adjourn meeting was made by Cheryl Gustason; Dee Sabol moved; the motion was seconded by Rick Gnemi. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Emily Wessing
Workforce Development, Inc.