

Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board  
Meeting Minutes

DATE, TIME: January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 9:00 AM

LOCATION: Zoom and BECWIB Conference Room

ATTENDEES: Julius Adams, Jomo Akono, Fred Boheim, Cheryl Byrne, John Cappellino, Steven Davis, D. Sylvester Dihaan, Elizabeth Galanis-Miller, Joseph Hanna, Charles G. Jones, Jr., Tracy Jordan-Cardwell, Thomas Kim, Brian Manley, Dennis Martinez, Brenda W. McDuffie, Oswaldo Mestre, Jr., Robert Mootry, Jr., Silvia Morales-Fakler, Spencer Murray, Scott Pallotta, Patricia Riegle, April Sanders, Michele Taylor, Myrna F. Young

EXCUSED/  
ABSENT: Andrew Federick, Cory Haqq, Michael Martin, Bridget Russo, Ralph Salerno, David Sullivan, Edward Walsh, Jr.,

STAFF  
ATTENDEES: Leslie Ayer, Kit Brown, Jessica Corrigan, Bukola Mallia, Francine Nicholas, Minesh Patel, Mauricio Perez, Denise Raymond-DiBlasi, Joseph Ricchiuzzi, Elizabeth Rivera, John Slenker, Demone Smith, Lavon Stephens, Geoffrey Szymanski

GUESTS: Mary Margaret Aprile, Joseph Brown, Kevin Zanner

TOPIC	DISCUSSION	ACTION
Call to Order	Mr. Jones welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:02 AM after verifying a quorum was present.	
1. Executive Director's Report	<p>Mr. Szymanski's presented the Executive Director's Report and touched on a number of topics:</p> <p><b>Erie County Healthcare Careers (EHC)</b> The Erie County Healthcare Careers program (EHC), which has replaced the Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG), has been so successful BECWIB asked the Erie County Legislature for an additional \$1.3 million in order to prepare for anticipated enrollment.</p> <p><b>Internal Restructuring</b> Francine Nicholas has been elevated to the position of Assistant Director with the retirement of David Kaczor and Minesh Patel has been elevated to the position of Manager of Grants and Compliance and will be trained by Ms. Nicholas.</p> <p><b>Gun Violence Prevention (GVP)</b> BECWIB has three subcontractors, Catholic Charities, Buffalo Urban League and The Service Collaborative, under contract to provide services under the Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) program, with a program end date of July 31, 2022. Based on the recommendation of the Youth Standing Committee and Chairman, BECWIB published a second RFP seeking GVP-related services but no responses were forthcoming. The WIB is considering options for enhancing GVP programming moving forward.</p> <p><b>WIOA Spending Rate</b> WIOA – Funding appears to be on pace though Training is lagging a bit behind, specifically with the Adult stream. The uptick in COVID likely affected winter programs and the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter will provide a clearer picture. This may be a trend considered in the next program year if COVID becomes an obvious seasonal problem correlating to winter months. HPOG – All closeout costs have been taken into account as of 12/31/2021; the program was affected by the prior two years of the pandemic. EHC – Training expenditures have amassed impressive totals. These funds are being spent at a good rate.</p> <p><b>Business Services</b> Since the last meeting, there has been a major increase in business and partner outreach as well as industry engagement with the On-The-Job Training (OJT) Program. There is a full docket of Pathways Programs scheduled.</p>	

<p>2. Minute Approval for October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Meeting</p> <p>3. Resolution Authorizing Temporary Increase to Wage Training Subsidy for OJTs</p> <p>4. Resolution Authorizing Lease with Toshiba Business Services</p> <p>5. Second Quarter Budget Report</p>	<p><b>RFP Status of the CAREERS Grant Website</b>                  The RFP to redesign the BECWIB webpage to be more user-friendly and accessible is on schedule to be posted in April with vendor selection in May. The \$50,000 CAREERS federal grant will be used for the redesign.</p> <p><b>COVID Protocols</b>                  There have been a number of adjustments to staff work schedules throughout the pandemic. With COVID numbers climbing, the WIB and WDC will be returning to rotating two-day work weeks. On January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022 the WDC will start Monday/Wednesday and the WIB will start Tuesday/Thursday. This schedule is anticipated to continue until April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022 when the state of the pandemic will be reevaluated.</p> <p><b>Thank You to Russell Sferlazza for His 40 Years of Service</b>                  Lastly, Mr. Szymanski announced the retirement of Russell Sferlazza after forty years of exemplary service to workforce in Buffalo and Erie County and wished Mr. Sferlazza all the best in the next chapter of his life. Mr. Szymanski opened the floor for questions and none were posed. Mr. Jones congratulated Ms. Nicholas and Mr. Patel and extended his gratitude to Mr. Sferlazza for decades of wonderful work.</p> <p>Mr. Jones called for a motion to approve the minutes from the October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 meeting.</p> <p>Ms. Nicholas presented the Resolution Authorizing Temporary Increase to Wage Training Subsidy for OJTs which would increase the maximum dollar amount of the OJT training subsidy per trainee from \$7,000 to \$10,000 as well as the aggregate maximum OJT training subsidy companies may be eligible to receive in a Program Year from \$21,000 to \$30,000 for those OJT contracts developed and implemented solely during the period of July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023. Ms. Nicholas opened the floor for questions and asked for a motion to approve the Resolution. Ms. Fakler-Morales asked for clarification on the Resolution as well as the OJT process and a discussion followed. Ms. Corrigan explained the entire OJT process and expanded on the thorough vetting procedure, offering to send over policies for further clarification. Mr. Jones asked for any further questions. None were posed and the Resolution was put to a vote.</p> <p>Mr. Ricchiazzi presented the Resolution Authorizing Lease with Toshiba Business Services, explaining it was discovered the WDC/WIB copiers were no longer under a service contract as the previous contract had terminated from being month-to-month for so long. A competitive rate was secured based off of the Erie 1 BOCES agreement and there will be a savings of nearly \$40,000 over the 63-month lease. In effect, the copier bill will be cut in half. Mr. Ricchiazzi opened the floor for questions and none were asked. Mr. Jones called for a motion to approve the Resolution.</p> <p>Mr. Ricchiazzi presented the Program Year (PY) 2021 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Budget Report and indicated everything is on track for the second quarter. Total Salaries and Fringes were \$1,827,307, Total Operating Expenses were \$492,171 and Total Training and Support Expenses were \$1,006,183. 57% of the budget remains for WIOA funds. The Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) was officially closed out. Program Year 5 for HPOG ended 9/29/2021 and additional closeout costs were incurred through 12/31/2021. There were \$891,330 in unspent funds and this was due to shut downs during the pandemic. The Erie County</p>	<p><b>Motion to approve the minutes from the October 26<sup>h</sup>, 2021 meeting was led by Mr. Mestre and seconded by Mr. Mootry. All were in favor. Motion carried.</b></p> <p><b>Motion to ratify Resolution Authorizing Temporary Increase to Wage Training Subsidy for OJTs was led by Ms. McDuffie and seconded by Mr. Cappellino. All were in favor. Motion carried.</b></p> <p><b>Motion to ratify Resolution Authorizing Lease with Toshiba Business Services was led by Ms. Young and seconded by Mr. Mestre. Twenty-three voted in favor and there was one abstention. Motion carried.</b></p>
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	<p>Healthcare Careers (EHC) Grant, intended to be a continuation of the HPOG Program, has about 75% of its budget remaining. Training expenditures are amassing at an impressive rate, highlighting the need for healthcare programs to be extended and hopefully improved. Though 100% of the budget remains for the Gun Violence Prevention (GVP) Initiative, \$1.2 million of the \$2.65 million awarded to the WDC has been awarded to sub-recipient organizations and all providers have a process in place to expend these funds. Costs should soon be incurred for this program. 34% of the budget remains for the Employment Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant (ER-NDWG) and 67% of the budget remains for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. Mr. Ricchiazzi asked if there were any questions and none were posed.</p>	
<p>6. Business Services Update</p>	<p>Ms. Corrigan began by announcing changes to the Business Services Team. Minesh Patel who formerly conducted project management for the Business Services Team was promoted to BECWIB's Manager of Grants and Compliance. Mauricio Perez has taken on a new hybrid role with the SUNY Erie Career Center allowing integration between the two teams. Ms. Corrigan shared that it has been an exceptionally busy few months and everything has continued to move in a positive direction. Pathways Programming Update: Four programs are scheduled for Program Year (PY) 2021-2022. OJT Update: There are currently 75 open OJT applications out with businesses for PY 2021-2022 within 13 different industries in comparison to closing out PY 2020-2021 with 21 open OJT applications out with businesses within 6 industries and 5 applications coming to contract and successful completion. It was noted the data for PY 2020-2021 begins in September 2020 when Ms. Corrigan took over Business Services and began tracking these metrics. Ms. Corrigan gave a special acknowledgment to Mr. Perez for his recent work with Buffalo's refugee community and the OJT program. Mr. Perez has been engaging closely with partner organizations to build closer partnerships to service the most vulnerable living within the community and because of his efforts two refugees from Afghanistan were successfully placed in OJTs with AESKU Inc. NY. Business and Partner Outreach Update: Business Outreach for October 2021 – December 2021 totaled 351 and Partner Outreach for October 2021 – December 2021 totaled 49. 13 unique industries were served. Mr. Mestre posed a question regarding outreach to businesses owned by minorities and minority women. Ms. Corrigan responded by explaining the tracking system which was implemented with the new fiscal year and elaborated the Business Services Team is both tracking this information and making it a priority at the center of their outreach and growth. They are actively calling minority and women-owned businesses off of Erie County's respective lists to try and make an impact. Ms. Morales-Fakler posed a question about outreach to Chambers of Commerce and Ms. Corrigan confirmed the Business Services Team is connected with all local Chambers of Commerce.</p>	
<p>7. SUNY Erie Career Center Update</p>	<p>Ms. Raymond-DiBlasi presented the SUNY Erie Career Center January 2022 Report regarding constituents served from 07/01/2021 through 12/31/2021. The Career Center continues to be very busy. Approximately 90% of customers have chosen to interact virtually. In person traffic has been light and most group-based events have been hybrid. Most appointments, workshops and clubs have been conducted online. A handful of customers have participated in person at the North Campus Video Conferencing Room with COVID</p>	

<p>8. Buffalo Employment and Training Center Update</p>	<p>precautions in place. It has been challenging to obtain data at the Center level for New Monthly Participant Reports due to the management system. Thomas Mormile of the NYSDOL was helpful in providing a report for the SUNY Erie Career Center for the period of 07/01/2021 - 12/31/2021. The Monthly Summary report showed 416 Adults, 652 Dislocated Workers and 56 TAA Workers were served by SUNY Erie Career Center Staff for a total of 1,124 individuals during the past two quarters. Ms. Raymond also explained the Business Services and SUNY Erie teams have integrated. There is a shared employee, Mauricio Perez, on-site three days a week at North Campus. This is the first time in many years where there has been integration between the two teams and it has been very successful, leading to engaging more with employers regarding job orders and resumes sent on behalf of customers. Ms. Raymond-DiBlasi furthered it has been challenging to place entry-level customers in minimum and low-wage jobs – this is not because there isn't a pool but rather that customers are requesting higher wages. There has been more success in placing people in jobs that pay closer to \$20/hour though it has still been a challenge. It has always been the goal of the Career Center to help customers find livable wages. Mr. Pallotta posed a question regarding the reason customers are not applying for entry-level jobs and a discussion ensued. Ms. Raymond-DiBlasi touched on benefits and pay as well as the many barriers employees are facing in today's workforce such as transportation, daycare and scheduling.</p> <p>Mr. Smith began by touching on the COVID protocols in place at the Center – as staff members are dealing directly with the public, extra precautions have been implemented. All staff members are vaccinated and wear KN95 masks. All staff members have been cross-trained in Placement and Training, whereas before the departments were separate. This enables a customer to work with one staff member through the entire process. Over the past year the Center has lost five staff members – there have been four retirements, including that of Deputy Director Terry Chatfield, as well as one death. These job vacancies have affected the offering of computer classes which previously made up a significant portion of the Center's numbers. Presently BETC is looking to fill the Deputy Director vacancy and other positions will be filled next. ITAs are going well; people are coming in for training. CDL training has been immensely popular throughout the pandemic, so much so a waiting list had to be implemented. CDL training has been spaced out so as to avoid overwhelming CDL training companies. Other training providers have come back online and are actively recruiting. There has been a push for virtual intake and services; literature is being updated to reflect this. Approximately 1,000 people from the City website have participated in virtual intake. There have been approximately 4,000 customers receiving emails and job announcements two to three times a week. BETC is now focusing on smaller job fairs targeting specific populations. There has been a joint effort with the Business Services Team to implement this strategy. BETC has been working with Buffalo's New American and Bangladeshi Communities to address an employment need within these communities. A job fair was recently put together in a short timeframe and it was so successful another job fair featuring Buffalo's New American and Bangladeshi Communities is scheduled for February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. All customers seeking online workshops are referred to the SUNY Erie Career Center. Mr. Smith opened the floor for questions. Mr. Akono suggested it would be advantageous for the NARCC to participate in the</p>	
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<p>9. Erie County Healthcare Careers Update</p>	<p>upcoming job fair. Mr. Smith also mentioned the project currently underway to recruit carpentry apprentices with an emphasis on women entering the trade, which is a continuation of a previously successful initiative.</p> <p>Ms. Rivera provided an update on the Erie County Healthcare Careers program (EHC). In the three short months since the inception of the program in October of 2021, 180 Erie County residents have been served. Working with partners, Erie 1 BOCES, Trocaire College, D'Youville College, SUNY Erie and Villa Maria College, 100 LPN students and 49 Registered Nursing students, including two students finishing up their Bachelors of Science in Nursing, have been assisted. Some of the other healthcare trainings funded include Surgical Technician, Diagnostic Medical Sonographer, Echocardiographer, Physical Therapist Assistant, Phlebotomist and Pharmacy Technician. The program has been marketed by a two-page color flyer and shared via email to partners as well as shared on the social media pages of Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz. Ms. Rivera asked if there were any questions but none were presented.</p>	
<p>Adjournment</p>	<p>Mr. Jones opened the floor for any further questions; none were posed. Mr. Mestre commended Mr. Sferlazza and Mr. Chatfield on their long, successful careers and retirements. Mr. Jones also congratulated Mayor Byron Brown for his hard-fought reelection victory. Mr. Szymanski introduced Joseph Brown and Kevin Zanner of Hurwitz &amp; Fine, P.C., BECWIB's new legal counsel. Mr. Jones thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and complimented WIB staff on their dedication and conscientiousness. Mr. Jones then called for adjournment.</p>	<p><b>Motion to adjourn led by Mr. Mestre and seconded by Mr. Dihaan. All were in favor. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:08 AM.</b></p>