

## **GRWDB Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, June 24, 2021, 12 PM

Members Present: Dr. A.D. Amar, Jacki Belin, Todd Bonsall, Susan Brooks, Beth Conte, Ron Douglas, Ana Galiotta (representing Chris Phelan), Joanne Hala, Maureen Kurdziel, Violet Kocsis (chair), Fran Leddy, Megan O'Reilly, Chris Phelan, Marc Saluk, Sejal Sharma, Tyler Seville, James Strickhart (representing Chrys Harttraft)

Guests & Staff Present: Sandra Addison-Britto (staff) Donna Allison, Jeanne Cassano (staff), Mike Frost, Paul Grzella (staff), Jessica Johannesen, Juanita Painson, Amanda Modale, Thomas O'Connor, Chris Peake, Ryan Roberts, Marc Schweitzer, Commissioner Douglas Singleterry, Tara Shepherd, Michael Valeriano

After welcoming everyone, Violet Kocsis asked that roll call be taken. Next, the March 25 board meeting minutes were approved, with Amar moving and Susan Brooks seconding (Satanik abstained).

### **Transportation**

Grzella reviewed the board's multi-year funding of transportation for customers who need assistance, using Needs Based Work Support funding, which often arrived late and was challenging to expend. With COVID and the loss of some clients it became even more challenging. Then the state decided not to issue Needs Based Work Support for the new program year, since many boards weren't using it and the state felt it would better for each board to use its awarded funds for transportation needs. Grzella met with Donna Allison of Ridewise and Tara Shepherd of GoHunterdon to discuss the situation and alternatives.

Allison pointed to the memo, which laid out the situation succinctly. he and Shepherd have met extensively to discuss this and believe it may time to refocus the program on employers rather than job seekers, as has been the program's thrust. The key issue is that with a dearth of vendors and the insurance threshold requirements by the county make it very difficult to find vendors who can provide point-to-point services for second- and third-shift workers. Shepherd noted that the program was much more staff intensive than anticipated, requiring multiple discussions with clients; she said this time should be factored into whatever future allocation the board considers.

In the document, Shepherd said the numbers in the memo reflect the "worst-case" scenario but would not go down sufficiently. The Ridewise number was based on real data since Ridewise was able to utilize a vendor initially for the program because they were pairing the work with another grant. The data shows how costly individual rides can be, limiting the number of people served and how many rides can be provided. Later hours for shift work can be a limiting issue, because it is also can limit the guaranteed number of rides.

Kocsis summarized the discussion, noting that the program as it had been running was not as effective as hoped and more time-consuming than anticipated. The recommendation would be to consider pivoting the program to working with employers, helping them to provide transportation subsidies for new hires. Grzella said that was correction; he added that the Somerset County Administrator Colleen Mahr informed him that one of her priorities is doing an inventory on current transportation services to see how effective they are and whether they could be provided differently. (Singletery confirmed that the commissioners have begun reassessing service delivery in several areas.) Mahr recommended that the board hold off on making any final decisions until direction is established by the county. Grzella said his point of adding this discussion to the agenda was to confirm the board still wanted to have transportation as a priority, and if so, started looking at how much money could be segregated for transportation funding.

Conte said she thinks transportation should remain a priority but thought decisions should wait until there is a better idea of where things will stand in the fall. Peake reiterated that transportation continues to be one of the biggest hurdles for customers seeking to retain work – he said both agencies were very helpful with solving issues and helping some customers get and keep jobs; with that in mind, the One-Stop Training Center supports transportation funding. Belin also confirmed that transportation is a barrier for some of RVCC's students, particularly as RVCC expands into new areas. Amar suggested that one consideration could be reimbursing customers for their transportation costs on an individual basis.

With the feedback in hand, Grzella said he had what was needed to continue planning a transportation response.

## **Finance**

Addison-Britto then presented the grant awards and the PY 2021 budget. Youth fund awards of \$502,400 – or a 34 percent increase over the previous year. (The Summer Youth Employment award was included in the presentation though the funding is PY20 budget item that goes into the PY21 program year). The Adult Dislocated Worker award of \$1.4 million is about a 19 percent year-over-year increase (she noted that PY20 funding was augmented by additional COVID funding which does not appear to be in play for the new program year). The final piece of the budget, the Workfirst NJ – TANF and SNAP/GA – of \$905,000 represents about a 3 percent year-over-year increase (comparisons are more challenging because the PY20 award was for a nine-month period because the state allowed PY19 funds to be carried over in the beginning of the program year, which it normally does not do). Workforce Learning Link received \$49,000. After the presentation, Belin moved and Hala seconded accepting the awards, and the board approved the motion.

Addison-Britto then presented the PY21 budget - \$281,000 for administration with another \$15,000 carried over from the PY20 unexpended budget. The salaries include the standard 2 percent county increase, along with the county's fringe rate of 51.97

percent. She then reviewed Career Services, which received about 90 percent of the funding for program. She noted that a portion of the director's salary goes to programming based upon the Cost Allocation Plan (CAP), that much of the salary for the Job Developer goes to programming and that the business manager salary in the Career Services goes to administration, again based on the CAP. She then reviewed the Contracts, noting that WIOA funding was increased by about 19 percent based upon the grant award.

She added that the budget also has \$104,000 for incumbent working training – cohort training. Grzella noted that this is based upon the policy approved by the board in 2020, which seeks to help businesses who are either upskilling or providing in-demand training for cohorts. (He noted that the GRWDB has its first example of this, working with the Morris-Sussex-Warren WDB to provide training for auto emission inspection – seven employees from Russell Wrench in Clinton are receiving the training on June 23 and 24 at a price point of approximately \$4,500. The point of the training is to give employees in-demand certifications and improve their skills and marketability.)

Saundra Addison Britto then continued the budget review, noting that each line was increased based upon the award. This leaves about \$233,000 in unbudgeted funds – this funding can be used to help cover allocation changes needed with any CAP update, and for other board priorities. This area is where funding can be identified for any new transportation priorities, Grzella noted. With no further questions, Kocsis asked for a vote. Douglas moved and Brooks second, and the draft budget was approved.

Grzella then reviewed the audit, which had some findings but, crucially, no disallowed costs. Some were specific questions about a cost and many of the findings revolve around tightening required procedures. Grzella noted that the audit was done remotely, and he said he was told that will be the model going forward. He added that staff is pleased with the audit. Kocsis asked that a report be provided to the board about the status of how the findings have been remedied. Grzella said he would work on that for the September meeting.

### **Summer Youth Employment Program**

Grzella then provided a quick update on the Summer Youth Employment Program – he introduced the GRWDB intern, Sneha Yalgi, who is providing crucial program support. The majority of the other 22 interns will start the following week, and Jeanne is working on starting another four. (The program has funding for 30 participants, and all participants work 21 hours per week for the employer and do another four hours a week in career-skill building using the Greater Raritan SkillUp program. In all, 14 private and public companies from around the counties are participating this year.

### **Business Services**

Amanda Modale provided an update of second quarter work, starting with the Job Match Project. This ongoing, multi-team effort sent out 600 job leads to 185,000 job seeker

emails, resulting in more than 250 connections between job seekers and employers. The team has expanded with the GRWDB intern and the assistance of One-Stop Career Training Center counselors.

During the second quarter, she and Jessica Johannesen hosted 26 recruitments with nearly 1,000 job seekers in attendance – the expectation was six recruitments. One event had no attendees, and another had 150 attendees. Show up rate for attendance versus sign-up averages around 32 percent. Overall, there are more openings than job seekers, which means employers must sharpen their competitive edge, including offering benefits on day one and having referred and sign-on businesses. Modale noted that she and Amanda can do these virtual sessions or only the behind-the-scenes job matching – whatever works best for the employer.

Johannesen then covered two state projects that business service representatives were brought in to assist. The first is with the Industry Partnership program, which has written 256 contracts for manufacturers throughout the state. The business representatives were responsible for reviewing 15 contracts and get them processed for reimbursement. The second project is with the PSE&G Clean Energy Program. They are recruiting for outreach professionals in multiple counties and field technician positions based in New Brunswick and Cranbury. The business representatives are responsible for promoting the open positions and then sending any resumes they receive on to Employment Services. Johannesen said she sent her first resume to Ron Douglas that day.

As part of the business outreach report, Grzella spoke about the Cannabis Industry Information Event and Job Fair being planned with the Readington-based Verano, a marijuana grower. The event is planned for July 20 at RVCC and will include information on the industry, leading to on-site job interviews that people can pre-register for – walk-ins also will be accommodated. Johannesen is setting up a registration form and will provide other state information.

### **One-Stop**

Peake started by reminding everyone to review the monthly One-Stop Operator report, which provides a summary of achievements, trends, and upcoming programs.

Staff has returned to office in Somerville full-time in May and residents can now come into Somerset County buildings for services. In Hunterdon County, a return date for staff is set for July 6 but there is no return for in-person services, so Hunterdon County residents will continue to be served remotely. Peake added that as in-person services return, the One-Stop will continue to offer hybrid services, since virtual platforms have enabled counselors and customers to have more flexibility. Since March, the Training Center has offered nine workshops with 175 attendees. The One-Stop also has increased outreach because of the slow return to client levels – this has included mailing materials to 117 nonprofits, resulting in new relationships and new clients. A mailing to 239 faith-based organizations also was done. There are also 150 new text-alert subscribers and send out emails to 4,200 UI recipients.

In addition, the One-Stop partnered with Somerset County Library System to create material for a marketing outreach. The Training Center team also created three new informational videos that are available to view on the Somerset County YouTube channel, on the GRWDB website and elsewhere. Links also have been shared with board and committee members. The videos are on topics the team thinks will be helpful to career seekers, based upon their internal discussions. Several more will be released throughout July, August, and September.

Sofia Banderia has started as a counselor in the One-Stop Training Center – she is the center’s second bi-lingual counselor. In addition, the Training Center is working with Reentry NJ on a HVAC program and a second new company, Infosys, to support a pre-apprenticeship program focusing on IT occupations. The company is looking to bring on 100 employees through a boot camp program.

The RFP for youth services were reviewed. A volunteer committee recommended the continuance of the contracts with Hunterdon County Vocational School District (WIOA Outreach) and Middle Earth (Youth Employment Services and WIOA Outreach). Belin made a motion, seconded by Singleterry, and the recommendation was unanimously approved.

Peake next discussed program monitoring. Monitoring by the One-Stop Career Training Center teams were conducted in February with follow up in May. They were done virtually, and one person performed some review processes in person and monitored Workfirst NJ, Learning Link and WIOA Youth Outreach. Highlights where that the agencies were flexible, innovative in meeting the challenges during the pandemic. In February the referrals where, as expected, below those in pre-pandemic years. However, an update in May found an uptick in referrals. here is an anticipated extension on the time allowed to spend the program funding. One-Stop customers survey results have been positive, 10% response statewide, the local results were overwhelmingly positive. State WIOA monitoring is going to occur quarterly with administrative findings has been addressed where any areas of concern were raised. Grzella and Kocsis suggested that the One-Stop Operating System should provide the Board with a report, like the fiscal reporting for the Board, providing an area of action report.

### **Labor Analysis**

Grzella displayed the analysis to date in 2021 compared to last year and the information is consistent with past reporting. Basic skills continue to remain as a top priority for employers. The workforce demographics for the area reveals that the workforce was a little bit older than the state average and things seem to be stabilizing where unemployment is concerned.

### **ChromeBook Loaner Program**

The Learning Link has 3 Chromebooks being used by customers on order to take part in the program virtually. One customer was using a Chromebook in Hunterdon County for

a workshop and returned it when completed. Grzella is working with HC Library to work out the distribution of the Chromebooks in the county so that Hunterdon County residents do not have to travel to Somerset County to access the books. The Executive Committee approved the purchase of 20 additional Chromebooks due to additional funding available that would have had to be returned if not spent. The state encouraged the purchase. Grzella requested to have a vote of the full board to approve the purchase of 20 additional chrome books. Dr. Amar made a motion and Galietta seconded with a unanimous vote by the board to approve the purchase of the additional Chromebooks.

### **Metrix/SkillUp**

Grzella presented an update on Metrix. We had an additional 220 customers sign up for the program since June 1. The State has now been sending notifications on the platform which has bumped in registrations. Seville had suggested that we contact those registrants whose enrollment is timing out to ask them if they would like to add onto their registration; each month Grzella is sending out a notice and asking them to reach out to be extended, around 10% of those respond affirmative. As a member of a Metrix user group that is developing a new dashboard look with an updated platform Metrix 4.0, Grzella has been continuing his involvement with the platform, the newest of which is a gamification platform - this will be tied to credentials and growing the audience of users.

### **Committee Reports**

The Disabilities Committee is planning a job fair/resource event to be held at RVCC in Oct. which will focus on employers and job seekers. We will be using the conference center on Oct 12<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 7 pm. The committee will be meeting throughout the summer to move the event forward.

The Literacy Committee continues to meet and supported the application by ESC and RVCC for grant funding for literacy programming. The programs will begin July 1 the training will begin at the end of October. Collateral will be updated to reflect these changes. Amy Lam, Literacy Volunteer of Somerset County, is the new committee chair.

The Youth Committee has met as well and one of the things that we will be focusing on is to get youth voices on the committee; outreach has contined and the State has developed best practices which the committee will be using as a guide to attract youth from the community to the committee.

### **Old Business and Other Business**

Grzella asked if Kocsis had anything to discuss concerning Operations and she reported that the committee went through the monitoring report.

Grzella then asked Douglas to report on Employment Services. He said the staff is trying to keep up with requests as they are made, and all is going quite smoothly. The Department of Labor should be opening in a few months to in person customers. Grzella

reported that they are looking for a date in July to open, but in person, appointment, no walk-in service and not unemployment in person service going forward. Virtual request form usage is at 30 to 50 per week, questions vary but job search activities appear to be increasing as a request.

There being no further business Kocsis asks for a motion to adjourn. Hala motioned and Belin seconded, so moved unanimously and the meeting was ended at 1:31 pm.

Next meeting is scheduled for September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 12 noon as an in-person meeting at RVCC but will offer a virtual option.