

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

Via Skype

Wednesday, April 8, 2020

1:31 pm

ATTENDANCE

Dr. Aldo Jackson ☎
Jim Decker ☎
Larry Fannie ☎
Dr. Lisa Miller ☎
Jody Dixon ☎
Gary Shaw ☎

GUESTS

Carmine Camillo ☎
Benjamin Wilson ☎
Tyrone Clark ☎
Brad Tisdale ☎

STAFF

Janet Anderson ☎
Deb O'Neil ☎
Erin Shaffer ☎
Julie Price ☎
Carrie Symes ☎
Jackie Hamilton ☎

WELCOME/ROLL CALL

Ms. Anderson called the meeting to order at 1:31 pm. As the committee membership has changed, the chair had not yet been determined. It was noted that there was a quorum.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – JANUARY 27, 2020

The meeting minutes dated January 27, 2020 were presented for approval.

MOTION

It was **moved** by Dr. Clark and **seconded** by Mr. Tisdale to approve the Business Solutions Committee Minutes dated January 27, 2020 as presented. All were in favor. **Motion passed and carried.**

COMMITTEE CHAIR SELECTION

Ms. Anderson noted that committee membership has been updated and reestablished, so committee chairs will need to be determined. Chairs are nominated by committee members and must be board members. Once nominated, the board chair appoints the committee chairs. Dr. Jackson nominated Dr. Miller and Dr. Miller nominated Dr. Jackson. It was noted that they could be appointed as co-chairs.

CURRENT OPERATIONS DURING COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Ms. Anderson noted that like the Workforce Solutions Committee meeting earlier in the day, the Business Solutions Committee meeting was largely going to be an update on current operations and the collection of feedback from board members. NWPA Job Connect staff has been working from home and all phone extensions have been forwarded to cell phones. Staff ran a dry run of remote work in the week before the office closed to work out any issues.

WAYS TO CONTACT NORTHWEST PA CAREERLINK®

Ms. Anderson noted that there are multiple ways to reach PA CareerLink® as listed on the agenda. The current phone systems were not able to be forwarded correctly, so multiple press releases have gone out sharing this information. While in-person training options are limited at this time, WIOA Supportive Services are still available and unemployed individuals qualify for these as dislocated workers. Supportive services dollars are being used to offset the cost of bills for those who qualify.

JOBSEEKER BLOG

EMPLOYER BLOG

Ms. Symes walked the committee through locating the new jobseeker and employer blogs on nwpajobconnect.org. These blogs are being updated regularly with information pertinent to each

audience. Ms. Dixon noted that she has been sharing some of the blog information with Erie Insurance employees. Though many are unaffected and retain employment during the pandemic, their family members and friends may not be so fortunate. The committee suggested employer buy-in for the blogs and if committee members were aware of any businesses willing to participate in that endeavor, they could contact NWPA Job Connect staff.

The most up-to-date UC contact information flyer was shared with the committee. Ms. Anderson noted that she has been working with Mr. Fannie and he has been able to provide great information about UC.

PLAN GOING FORWARD

Ms. Anderson shared that the Northwest was fortunate enough to be well-prepared for short-notice remote work with cell phones and mifis thanks to the ongoing mobile service delivery effort. NWPA Job Connect staff also worked to help a BWPO staff member with an available laptop and mifi. Ms. Anderson, Mr. Fannie, and Ms. Brick had been working with the state to potentially accommodate Unemployment Compensation staff in the closed PA CareerLink® - Erie County office to continue to allow services to be conducted while maintaining social distancing that cannot be achieved in the call center. However, UC was able to provide their staff with equipment to work remotely as needed.

Local staff has been working through ways to collect signatures and paperwork with respect for PII. Because this way of working is new to everyone, including the state, there were no policies or procedures in place to address obtaining required signatures or documents from job seekers. Staff is making educated decisions based on acceptable procedures of other state funded partners. As far as work experiences, Ms. Anderson noted that staff has been working with ResCare and their legal team to permit more than 360 hours for each opportunity. This is needed by employers who are still permitted to operate but are not ready to hire participants due to the uncertainty about the future of their operations.

FUNDING REQUESTS

Ms. Anderson noted that board staff worked to submit a Strategic Innovation Grant to support a new system-wide phone system and technology to support increased virtual operations. This submission was largely based on a WORC grant that was not submitted in time in 2019. Ms. Anderson and Ms. Brick are working to secure Rapid Response Additional Assistance funding and are looking into utilizing Economic Transition funding for supportive services. The state is considering an application for a Dislocated Worker Grant and asked all local areas to submit post-pandemic plans to inform that application. This was included in the meeting packet. Local PA CareerLink® offices will not be permitted to reopen until the state allows. Ms. Anderson and Mr. Fannie attend weekly state calls.

POST-PANDEMIC PLAN

Ms. Anderson referred to the provided attachment, which was submitted to the state previously. When offices reopen, it is not expected to be business as usual. Ms. Anderson and the Operator anticipate that there will be a need to social distance despite a large influx of those in need of services. It is important to engage who we can right now to alleviate that influx. Ms. Anderson noted that part of the plan is to set up pop-up transition centers around the region and have an additional transition center in Erie. Expanding virtual services for clients across all partners is also a focus of operations going forward.

Ms. Anderson shared that a Lean Governance Council will be implemented to regularly review operations and make suggestions for adjustments. The council will be made up of geographically dispersed staff from multiple partners as well as a staff member from NWPAs Job Connect.

Ms. Anderson shared that the High Priority Occupations List process is expected to be expedited to meet the changing needs of jobseekers and employers alike. It is expected that employers could benefit from incumbent worker training due to the additional cleaning processes required of reopening businesses during the pandemic. However, incumbent worker training funded by WIOA dollars is capped at 20% of spending. Another change that may become apparent is that “baby boomers” will chose to retire instead of returning to the workforce, due to their increased vulnerability to COVID-19.

PWDA-OTHER AREA PLANS

Ms. Anderson referred to the notes provided via email regarding the post-pandemic plans of other areas in the state. She noted that communication about UC will be vital as the UC phones have been shut off and customers are used to having access to this. Expectations need to be managed through consistent and clear messaging. Ms. Anderson emphasized that once permitted, in-person services will only be available by appointment only. Additionally, the Governor has asked that local areas consider security for all comprehensive sites, specifically for alleviating the influx of customers seeking only UC services and/or UC phone use, which will not be immediately available due to the sheer volume of calls already being received. Some areas are considering virtual or parking lot triage.

Ms. Anderson noted that some other areas are considering drive-thru services and boosting wifi coverage to include parking lots.

RESCARE UPDATE

Mr. Camillo noted that many calls are about UC, and staff are passing along the appropriate information that is currently available. Then, those callers are engaged through the possibility of providing WIOA supportive services. If all documentation is readily available, these assistance funds may be provided within as little as 2-3 days. Clients are still counseled on the forbearance process prior to applying.

Mr. Camillo noted that Title I and BWPO counterparts work together to get job postings on CWDS and they have been engaging life-sustaining employers who are still operating. Virtual job fairs are being planned, two new OJTs were started in Venango County last week, partners participated on a call hosted by Venango Chamber, and the Youth team found six new work experience opportunities last week. Mr. Fannie recalled a conversation at the Workforce Solutions Committee meeting about the importance of counseling jobseekers to avoid panicked decisions about unemployment. There may be cases where working on advancing skills may be most appropriate. Dr. Miller asked about the employer response to outreach efforts and Mr. Camillo noted that up to about two weeks ago, employers had multiple openings, but recently things seemed to have been put on hold with very few openings and employers communicating uncertainty. Staff continues to be careful when reviewing employment opportunities to determine if they may be temporary in nature.

Dr. Jackson asked about the response to the layoffs at the Surgery Center in Meadville. Mr. Camillo was unsure if PA CareerLink® received a notice to conduct a Rapid Response event. He noted that his team has reached out to the employer as well as the jobseekers through UC filing information. Ms. Anderson noted that board staff receives a statewide list of Rapid Response activity, but it has been difficult to collect that information in one place. Dr. Jackson asked how many calls have been received by the system since closing and Mr. Camillo reported 388 from closing to the previous Friday. Mr. Camillo noted that new clients

getting assistance are sharing that information with family, friends, and neighbors and those people are contacting the system directly through their Talent Development Specialist instead of the main numbers. Mr. Decker asked Mr. Camillo if PA CareerLink® will be overwhelmed as UC has been. Mr. Camillo noted that significant funds are still available for supportive services through the Economic Transition grant, and there are still sizeable funds available for WIOA adults. It has been especially difficult to serve those who were seeking employment before the pandemic began. Mr. Decker asked Mr. Camillo if Title I is taking any shortcuts to expand resources to avoid running out of funding or manpower. Mr. Camillo noted that additional front-line staff will be added to conduct intake and create files, then client flow will move from one station to the next as needed. Mr. Decker noted the situation is community wide and Mr. Camillo noted that there could be additional waves of the pandemic, so staff is planning these service delivery adjustments to be retained on a long timeline. Mr. Decker noted that Title I should be asking employers about their expectations for returning to work. Some employers may not be back up to 100% for months to years, and some may right-size due to adjusted operations. All of these factors will determine how many workers will need new work in the coming months. It was emphasized that this kind of information be gained and shared at the employer level throughout the system. Ms. Anderson noted that all these reasons feed into requests for Rapid Response Additional Assistance funding. She also noted that prior to the pandemic, the area was having difficulty filling very skilled positions, and the effort to engage employers over career pathways is still needed. Additionally, it was noted that the influx of clients may not happen right away, as some may stay on unemployment as long as possible due to many reasons, such as lack of childcare options, the additional payment from the federal government, or being hesitant to confront the possibility of contracting COVID-19.

Mr. Decker emphasized the importance of good marketing, particularly to those who may be on unemployment for the first time. This could communicate the benefits of upgrading a skillset for returning to your employer or perhaps finding a new opportunity. Ms. Anderson noted that this could be funded through some admin dollars or Title I. It was noted that this could be a good tactic for any large layoff. The committee was still concerned about the system's ability to manage a response to a significant marketing campaign. Mr. Camillo noted that virtual services allow for the ability to help a larger amount of people.

Dr. Miller noted an additional message could be to reach employers with information on how incentives will impact their operations, due to the disconnect between state and federal messages on these kinds of assistance. Confidence in this knowledge is needed.

Mr. Decker asked if anyone was aware of employer surveys going out, as his organization is working on one and he didn't want to duplicate efforts. Ms. Anderson noted that an employer survey is part of the Workforce Needs Assessment, but she was unsure of when it would be conducted. She will inquire at the next meeting with the vendor.

****ACTION****

- 1. Ms. Anderson will inquire about employer surveys in the region and with the Workforce Needs Assessment vendor.**

BWPO UPDATE

Ms. Anderson asked Mr. Fannie to provide an update as well. Mr. Fannie noted that BWPO and BWDA are reviewing the submitted post-pandemic plans to ensure compliance and review potential funding resources. The state wants to make sure everyone is sharing what they are doing to ensure that when something works well, that success is shared. Mr. Fannie noted that the state is working on how to get the information out about UC. PA CareerLink® is not UC, but is able to help in other ways and should show empathy. Once restrictions are lifted, it will be important to get the word out about how services are being provided. Mr.

Fannie noted that currently, there are no plans to reactive UC phones at comprehensive sites. He further noted that not all partners may be able to participate at sites under new conditions. Mr. Fannie further noted that many of the practices that are being implemented will likely be adopted as long-term ways of providing services. Partners will continue to work together and with elected officials and other county agencies on consistent messaging.

Mr. Fannie noted that BWPO is currently still providing services to those enrolled in reemployment before the pandemic struck, as is Trade. Mr. Fannie also stated that the Governor has implemented an additional website for essential employers with immediate openings for 10 or more employees. Mr. Fannie reported that UC claims that to date there have been 1,100,000 UC claims filed in Pennsylvania since the pandemic started. Almost all of the UC staff is back online after addressing remote work issues with respect to social distancing. The department is also adding additional temporary employees. In the future, some other state staff may be dislocated to provide UC services in this great time of need.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Anderson noted that the National Association of Workforce Boards via the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board, is asking local boards to send letters to legislators, especially Glenn Thompson, about stimulus funding for workforce. Ms. Anderson will be submitting a template letter.

Ms. Anderson noted that there are at least 10 employers interested in the State Local Internship Program this summer, but the state has yet to determine what the guidelines will be other than the positions must be at essential, life-sustaining businesses and individuals must be essential employees and if under 18, need parental permission. In the meantime, staff is asking employers to consider virtual job opportunities for interns.

REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Ms. Anderson will inquire about employer surveys in the region and with the Workforce Needs Assessment vendor.**

ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jackie Hamilton
NWPA Job Connect