

MassHire Central Region Workforce Board
Executive Committee
February 21, 2025; 8:30 AM
Conducted via MS Teams

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Paul Gilbody, Joshua Froimson, Janice Ryan Weekes, Libis Beuno, Robin Hooper
Staff: Jeff Turgeon

- J. Turgeon welcomed the members and the meeting was started. After discussion of the 12-20-24 committee meeting minutes, a motion was made to approve the minutes pending an edit to the reference in the minutes to the Board's switch from social media platform "X" to correct a typo on the name of the platform. The motion was made, seconded and approved unanimously.
- J. Turgeon then updated the attendees about Board activities, including the upcoming career center monitoring effort the week of March 10th being done in coordination with the state, which monitors the Board and career center as well. Also, the Board is overseeing the YouthWorks year-round youth employment program that is currently enrolling youth from Worcester, Milford and the Blackstone Valley area. Planning work continues for the summer YouthWorks program funded at just over \$2 million. This represents a decrease from the previous few years of funding but maintains a program for approximately 650 youth next year. The Board is also working with regional partners on the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) funded School to Career Connecting Activities program. This initiative dovetails with another DESE initiative to support the use of a new data management tool for implementing and tracking Work-Based learning efforts by the schools. This new tool is from MEFA and some districts are receiving new funds to convert to it's use from their own legacy systems.
- J. Turgeon also highlighted other project that is being led by the Board, such as the Healthcare Hub and Behavioral Health Hub grant programs, along with CDL, and projects through the Worcester Jobs Fund. This includes a \$300,000 grant for our Healthcare partners at Quinsigamond Community College and Mount Wachusett Community College to add in English for Speakers of Other Languages instruction to Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter residents as part of their existing healthcare Hub projects. These two programs will align with five new projects being established for EA shelter residents in EOL plus career technical training in healthcare, construction work, warehouse work, child development, and culinary. The Board is also implementing two IT-related projects, one funded through Jobs For the Future (JFF) for healthcare IT training in CompTIA and another through the Clark University TechBoost grant in three different IT related tracks. L. Beuno suggested future IT training in low-code/no-code program logic flow would be a good thing to do given the rise in Artificial Intelligence. He will send to J. Turgeon more information regarding this emerging field so that the Board and or Career Center can pilot training. J. Turgeon noted a couple free online training programs they are

offering, including one that helps prepare for trainees to take the CompTIA certification test. L. Beuno expressed an interest in learning more about this and J. Turgeon will follow up with him directly. Lastly, J. Turgeon noted that the Board is working to set up the \$400K contract with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that will fund job training in hazardous materials handling, now that these funds have been “unfrozen.”

- J. Ryan Weekes then discussed career center related items, including a successfully filling vacancies but having the need to fill two new vacancies at the Southbridge Career Center, which, combined with two staff there being out on Family Medical Leave, means that the Worcester staff need to assist with carrying the workload there – some of it done virtually. She also highlighted that long-time Veterans Representative staff person, Bill Ryan, who has won numerous awards and accolades for his work, will be retiring in the coming months. She also discussed the success of the virtual career fairs being held this Winter that has helped ensure strong turnout, regardless of weather or snowstorms. The January virtual job fair attracted more than 600 job seekers and the next one is scheduled for March 19th. She also discussed staff a career center training in the near future for career center staff on creating a positive culture, and that they recently held a training for senior leaders on how to identify and handle employees struggling with addiction. She also noted for the committee that the career center has upgraded their workshop room technology and are now working with the building owners to repair the walls from the previous set up.
- J. Ryan Weekes also highlighted that the NAACP recognized her for her service to the community and stated this was a recognition of the entire career centers’ work, but J. Turgeon strenuously disagreed with this assessment, stating she fully deserved individual recognition for her success in this area.
- The committee then discussed Board membership and the need to bring on one or two new private sector members with the departure of Dean Messier from Imperial Distributors. It was suggested that J. Turgeon reach out to Polar Beverage as well as National Grid, and P. Gilbody is reaching out to a colleague at Webster Five. J. Turgeon will keep the committee informed of this topic for suggested next steps with onboarding new member(s).
- The committee then discussed the full board meeting agenda items for April and the need for the Board to approve WIOA Youth contract renewal recommendations as one smaller topic, but room for other topics or guest speakers. It was suggested that follow up on the status of Federal and State trends would be helpful. It was also suggested that introducing the new low-code/no-code transformation may be of interest and L. Beuno said he could assist with that. He also highlighted a new AI tool that he has incorporated into his phone answering system and invited members to call his company at 508-960-6888 to experience it first-hand. If members suggest other agenda items, they should reach out to Jeff and Paul.
- The executive committee meeting will next meet on Friday, March 21, 2025 at 8:30am via MS Teams.
- Hearing no other business, P. Gilbody then accepted a motion and second to adjourn and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by: J. Turgeon