

FINGER LAKES WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD FINGER LAKES WORKFORCE SYSTEM MEETING

Thursday, January 13, 2022
via Zoom

Attendance: K. Bailey, C. Caughey, J. Celso, J. Davis, R. DeVay, C. Eirmann, J. Geiger, L. Haust, L. Johnson, A. McGraw, J. Murphy, M. Sykes, J. Vrabel, J. Williams-Como

Staff: D. Badger, B. Bilia, L. Freid, J. May, M. Woloson

Absent: J. Weaver, M. Whirtley

A motion to approve minutes from the December 9, 2021 meeting was made by Ms. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Davis. All in favor, motion carried.

COVID-19 Update

Ms. Murphy noted that as of December 14th, all NYSDOL staff are required to wear masks at all times, unless they are eating or drinking or in an enclosed room by themselves.

Mr. Davis shared that TANF classes are to be offered virtually soon and will remain so through the end of March. He also reported that half of the Social Services staff in Yates County have been out on any given day in the last two weeks, due to COVID.

Ms. Bailey stated that Ontario County is not allowing any group activities, but otherwise there have been no changes to the COVID protocols in place.

Mr. Vrabel reported that masks and screenings of visitors is being required in Seneca County.

Ms. Geiger shared that ACCES-VR has also had staff members out for COVID positive cases and contact quarantines. The office is encouraging appointments and the number of walk-ins has been minimal.

Ms. Freid informed the group that COVID has also impacted the WIB office and staff are using best practices/common sense to stay healthy and protect the medically vulnerable in our lives. She then asked for any feedback received from businesses about impacts to hiring.

Ms. Geiger reported hearing that businesses are returning to virtual interviews and limiting in-person activities.

Ms. Murphy shared that her staff have been told by customers that they are concerned schools will return to distance learning, which would impact parents' employment prospects.

Mr. Vrabel stated that the local McDonalds' franchisee told him that the stores have been hit hard and he and his employees are taking operations one day at a time.

Mr. Davis disclosed that Yates County staff need to be creative to assist healthcare workers who were laid off due to vaccine refusal and are unable to collect UI. He stated that some of those who refused the vaccine are intending to stay in the healthcare sector, hoping that the US Supreme Court will overturn the NYS vaccine mandate for healthcare workers. Ms. Geiger shared that many former healthcare workers are going to work for social services agencies such as the ARCs, that do not have a vaccine mandate. Mr. Davis then asked Ms. Murphy if Contact Tracers are being laid off now that the state is not performing contact tracing and she said that no information about that has been shared yet.

Reports

Mr. Woloson reported the following unemployment numbers for November, described as astoundingly low: Ontario, 3.2%; Seneca, 3.5%; Wayne, 3.2%; Yates, 2.8%; Finger Lakes, 3.2%; NYS, 5.5%; US, 3.9%. In November, Career Center staff assisted 2,946 customers remotely and 830 customers visited the centers in-person. Also in the month of November, 3,401 customers visited websites of the four counties and WIB.

In December, 27 SkillUp users completed trainings and 38 completed SkillSoft courses. Mr. Woloson reported that SkillUp is offering weekly Q&A sessions on Wednesdays and he will contact area users directly regarding testimonials for the upcoming press release. Mr. Davis suggested that staff members who have not taken a course or have not taken a new gaming course do so in order to better assist customers with the platform. Ms. Bailey shared that both Mr. Sykes and Ms. Haust have both completed SkillUp gaming courses and felt that this should be mandatory for front-line staff to better assist customers.

Ms. Freid thanked the OJT Work group, sharing that the OJT policy was significantly edited and updated with current feedback and input from the BSR team. The updated policy has been approved by the Performance and Evaluation Committee. Approval of the policy will be before the full Board on January 19th.

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Ms. Freid shared that due to the existing state of TAA policy confusion and overall duress over the last several decades – she, Michael Woloson and Julia Murphy will work directly with the county determined personnel to get to a working solution moving forward. Next steps are to get better clarification on DoL technical advisories for TAA and the current county contracts. This group will be updated as the process progresses.

Opportunities Committee – Ms. Freid shared that she and Mr. Vrabel met with Chris White at DoL, Albany to discuss their next customer survey and share the FL region intent to do similar. Local survey questions were shared with Albany and discussed opportunity for Albany to capture more local/direct information to share. Ms. Freid offered to reach out to Mr. White and get a current update on status.

Youth Update

Ms. Badger stated that WIB staff recently met with representatives from FLCC and it was decided to postpone “Finger Lakes Works...with their hands!” until May 25, 2022. Ms. Badger also shared that the Youth Committee met on January 13th and discussed the extension of the RFP and the Youth Team recently discussed updating program forms. In the 2nd Quarter, the youth program saw 24 In-School participants and 68 Out-of-School.

Fiscal Update

Ms. Freid introduced new WIB Staff Accountant, Bobbi Jo Bilia, who has filled the position left vacant by Jordan Bates. Ms. Freid shared that the WIB is coming off the PY’20 Independent Audit and has begun virtual monitoring with FOTA. Additionally, she acknowledged that the fiscal department has had an intense year (2021) with new executive director, multiple fraud events and significant staff change over in the fiscal department alone. Ms. Freid is aware that there has been recent delay in payment for some OJTs and stated that the fiscal team is doing their best to get caught up and asked the FL Workforce System to please let us know when we are behind on something so we can immediately address it. Continued patience and workplace compassion is appreciated.

Disability Resource Coordinator

Mr. Woloson shared that the WIB is in the process of creating a required plan for the position/program, as well as a budget. Once the plan is approved by Albany, the WIB will move forward with the hiring process, likely through RFP but direct hire is also an option.

Good Jobs Challenge

Ms. Freid reported that the group behind the 9 county regional effort, headed by RochesterWorks, is meeting weekly and has received feedback from the healthcare, manufacturing, and skill trades industries regarding training programs.

FAME – CauseWave

Ms. Freid stated that FAME is ready to proceed with the 6-week rapid prioritization process with 10-12 members comprised of FAME manufacturers and manufacturing related agencies that cover the nine-county region. An updated strategic plan with specific goals outcome will be shared. The plan will start in February; ending in March.

Other Business

Ms. Murphy informed the group that the Geneva NYSDOL location was chosen as one of 10 pilot centers open to having in-person customers via appointments. A security guard has been hired to ensure that only visitors asked to report to the office in-person are allowed in the building. Most of the in-person customers have been happy to visit the office and virtual appointments remain available. Since the December 9th meeting, NYSDOL staff from the Geneva and Lyons offices have met with 269 customers virtually and in-person and have assisted 375 customers over the phone with unemployment questions and other matters. The January 11th virtual NYSDOL job fair saw 291 attendees and 42 participating businesses. The next job fair is scheduled for February 8th.

Ms. Geiger shared that ACCES-VR has presented Worker Retention Workshops at monthly NYSDOL virtual workshop sessions and they are presenting more Disability Awareness trainings. Ms. Geiger also reported that ACCES-VR is seeing an increase in working families.

Mr. Davis stated that the Certified Production Technician (CPT) program will begin on January 24th at the FLCC Yates County location. Mr. Davis expects 4-7 customers to participate.

Ms. Bailey reported that Mr. Sykes has been busy with OJTs and Customized Training and has surpassed the Ontario County OJT quota for the program year. Ms. Haust has also been busy with ITAs is on track to surpass the ITA quota for the year.

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Ms. Freid shared that she has been collecting anecdotal information regarding suggested programmatic and policy changes, which will be shared with state and federal legislators during 2022 legislative session. She encouraged all to send related ideas to her to add to the list.

Mr. Vrabel reported that Seneca County staff are working closely with mandated customers and they are seeing an uptick in website traffic. Also, the new Love's Truck Stop is scheduled to soft open on February 17th and is hiring 90 people. Mr. Vrabel noted that he will be following up with the Rapid Response Team regarding the 329 employees affected by the closure of the Willard Drug Treatment facility. Ms. Murphy stated that most of the employees have been transferred to other facilities.

Mr. Celso reported that he continues to write OJT contracts and he is seeing Wayne County businesses continue to raise wages in order to attract applicants.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 10, 2022 at 9:30 a.m., via Zoom.