

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(WDB)**

**7:30 a.m.
March 18, 2022**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Dr. Karen Campbell
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. John DeVere
Mr. William Dorward
Ms. Marianne Egolf
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Thomas McNelis
Mr. Scott Mengle
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Rick Olmos
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Mr. Michael Rowley
Mr. Russell Showers
Ms. Karyn Troxell

Members Absent

Ms. Debra Antol
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Alexia Pursley
Mr. David Turner
Mr. Barry Unger

Staff and Guests Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Helen Amole	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Ms. Marybeth Ferguson	Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO)
Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez	Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mr. Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County ES Team Supervisor
Mr. Larry Melf	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Yanimer Serrano	PA L&I Rapid Response Coordinator
Ms. Naomi Young	Economic Development Company, Lancaster
Ms. Heather Berger	County of Berks Information Systems

All Board members and guests participated in the meeting via the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting or teleconference call-in option. The meeting was called to order by Ms. Gage-Linderman at 7:34 a.m. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the public via YouTube through the County's website and was being recorded for minutes purposes only and that the recording would be deleted. An attendance roll call was taken, and a quorum was present. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Berger for her assistance in the live streaming through the County's website.

Mr. Fogarty introduced the Consent Agenda items on behalf of the Chair and asked if any items should be moved for later discussion prior to the vote:

- Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes (December 10, 2021)
- Approval of PY2021 Revised Budget as recommended by the Finance Committee
- Approval of 2022 Employer Symposium and Job Fair Statement of Work as recommended by the DEI Committee

Mr. Fogarty also asked if any members wished to abstain from action on any Consent Agenda items. Hearing no abstentions and as no members requested any items to be moved from the Consent Agenda, on behalf of the Chair, Mr. Fogarty moved to adopt the Consent Agenda and announced WDB approval of all Consent Agenda items with no abstentions.

Ms. Gage-Linderman announced that Ms. Alexia Pursley, Human Resources Manager at Arkema, Inc., was appointed by the Berks County Board of Commissioners as a business representative on the Board effective February 15, 2022. We look forward to Ms. Pursley joining us in person at our June 17 meeting.

Ms. Gage-Linderman next invited Mr. Fogarty to comment on the PY2020/2021 Local WIOA Title I Performance Measures. Mr. Fogarty reported that the Commonwealth and all local areas including Berks met performance for PY2020. He also noted that our overall performance for PY2021 through the 2nd quarter is above acceptable levels.

Mr. Fogarty reported that the terms of eight Board members will expire on June 30, 2022. He asked those members to advise him by March 31 if they are not willing to be renominated and reappointed by the Commissioners for an additional three-year term. Members whose terms will expire on June 30, 2022 are Ms. Jenny Batista, Mr. Michael Fischetti, Mr. Robert Harrop, Mr. Michael Rowley, Mr. Barry Unger, Mr. Thomas McNelis, Mr. William Dorward and Ms. Debra Millman. Mr. Fogarty added he sent a letter to the PA L&I OVR Executive Director Shannon Austin on February 23, 2022 requesting her assistance in naming an OVR representative to the Board as soon as possible.

Ms. Noll reported on the Finance Committee report stating that our PY 2021 expenditures are at or within budget. She also projected that all WIOA Title I 80% obligation requirements will be exceeded.

On behalf of Ms. Gage-Linderman, Mr. Fogarty invited Ms. Kershner to comment on the One-Stop Oversight Committee Report. Ms. Kershner referred to the *By the Numbers* chart for

the period July 2021 through December 2021, stating that the total customer foot traffic for the period was not yet back to pre-pandemic levels. However, 379 individual businesses were served during the period. There were 1,584 virtual services provided through December 2021 and those services are still being provided and encouraged for customers who prefer to access them virtually.

The Radisson Hotel, which was to be the site of the Spring Job Fair, unexpectedly closed its doors. Ms. Kershner commented that the PA CareerLink® team worked very hard to secure the Abraham Lincoln Hotel for the April 19th event. She added that 90 employers are already signed up to participate. Mr. Fogarty noted that our local Rapid Response team reached out on short notice to the Radisson's general manager who confirmed that only about a dozen workers were still employed and impacted on the closing date (March 4, 2022).

Mr. McNelis, reporting for the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, stated that the Committee is still waiting for an OVR representative to be appointed to fill the vacancy which occurred when Ms. Carole Homolash retired in October, 2021. As previously reported, Mr. Fogarty reached out via a letter to the PA Department of OVR requesting a replacement be named as soon as possible. He added that Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez, OVR, remains an active member of the Board's Youth Committee.

Mr. McNelis next commented on the Committee's plans for the National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October 2022. The 2022 Employer Symposium and Job Fair Statement of Work which was approved on the Consent Agenda will be sent to the County to issue a Request for Proposals. A key strategic partnership with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) will be continued in this important work.

Ms. Batista reported on the Youth Committee and specifically referred to support from the Committee to allocate program funds to the Young Adult (YA) Program Supportive Services for much needed contracted driver training services to be provided by Advance Driving School, Reading, PA for up to eight participants. Training will be delivered at the contractor site but those in need will be provided transportation to the driver school by YA staff. Participants will be identified through a needs assessment survey that all YA participants take upon enrollment. Each participant will be required to complete the Work Keys assessment, a successful Paid Work Experience placement of 360 hours and at minimum half of their High School Equivalency diploma (if applicable) before this supportive service would be provided. The proposed plan conforms to the Berks County WDB Supportive Services for WIOA Related Programs Policy.

Mr. Stevenson was asked by Ms. Batista to comment on the 2022/2023 Berks Business-Education Grant Project. The Berks County Workforce Development will serve as the Fiscal Agent for the \$141,164 grant titled "*Career Ready Berks Alliance: Continuing Student Career Discovery to Create, Grow, and Retain a New Generation of Workforce Talent in Berks County Project*".

Following are the specific grant program allocations:

1. Berks County Career & Technology Center - \$15,000 for marketing and delivery of 5-day Career Exploration Camps from all junior high/middle schools in the 16 sending school districts in Berks County in June 2023
2. Reading/Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center - \$44,048 for marketing and delivery of 5-day Career Exploration Camps to student applicants from all junior high/middle schools in the Reading and Muhlenberg School Districts in Berks County in June 2022 and June 2023.
3. Berks County Intermediate Unit - \$25,000 for technical development of the Career Ready Berks Pathway Video Series. The videos will be available to all 18 school districts for posting on their web sites and to use at parent nights and counseling events. The videos will be produced in English and Spanish and will be ADA compliant.
4. Manufacturers Resource Center - \$43,000 for delivery of a five-part video series curriculum and additional instructional materials, professional consultation with training in videography and editing, website development, coordination with employer volunteer sponsors, and other program deliverables to student teams from 18 Berks County middle schools for participation in the 2022 *What's So Cool About Manufacturing* Student Video Contest and Awards Event and made available to all 24 Berks County middle schools for participation in the 2023 program with the implementation of identified lessons learned on engaging diverse student populations. The Lesson Plan will be translated and distributed in Spanish the first program year.

Recruitment from area manufacturers of an additional 8-10 young professional “PA Dream Team Berks County” volunteer members in the period from February 2022 to December 2023. The Pre and Post PA Dream Team Survey Lesson Plan, aligned with academic standards for career exploration, will be made available for educators in English and Spanish.

Mr. DeVere reported on the Training and Industry Partnership Committee’s quarterly meeting. Minutes from the meeting note that since July 1, 2021, 38.5% of the allocated \$75,000 (\$17,645 for Incumbent Worker Training [IWT] plus \$11,250 for Registered Apprenticeships) has been obligated or reimbursed to eligible employer applicants for two WDB priority industry sectors: Manufacturing and Construction. Mr. DeVere was pleased to learn that we have received a number of new applications from employers over the past three weeks. As a result, we have now obligated just over 70% of our budgeted funds. Mr. DeVere commended Mr. Stevenson for his ongoing company outreach.

Cambridge-Lee Industries applied for \$5,750 for a “train the trainer” program reimbursement. Mr. DeVere explained that, although train the trainer programs have generally not been included in the eligible IWT training plans in the past, this training focus is very specific to the required Cambridge-Lee Industrial Maintenance Registered Apprenticeship standards approved by the PA DOL&I Apprenticeship & Training Office and the US DOL Office of Apprenticeships. Following discussion, the Committee supported Cambridge-Lee Industries’ IWT application in the amount of \$5,750 as allowed by existing Board policy.

Mr. DeVere briefly commented on the healthcare, construction and manufacturing industry sector updates from the committee report and added that the What's So Cool About Manufacturing's award ceremony is scheduled for April 25, 2022. The Dream Team membership has grown to 14 young professional volunteers with planned expansion to 20-25.

Mr. Rowley referred to the January 22, 2022 Planning Committee Minutes with an update on the work plan of the Ad Hoc Task Force on Adult English Language Proficiency and Numeracy, adding that the Task Force has been doing a great job.

Mr. Fogarty reported that four separate virtual listening sessions were held with thirty local employers and the task force next plans to hold 3-4 in person community listening sessions. The first community listening session for Adult Education/ESL Learners will be conducted in English on March 23, 2022 at RACC's Miller Center. The Berks Latino Workforce Development Corporation is hosting a community session in Spanish and English at their office on South Sixth Street on Saturday, April 2, 2022. Plans are also being formulated by I-Lead to hold a community session in Spanish at St. Peter's Church and another Spanish session is under discussion for a north side of Reading venue.

Mr. Rowley next introduced Ms. Naomi Young, Director, Center for Regional Analysis, Lancaster Economic Development Company. The latest State of Berks County's Economy report was just published on March 16, 2022 and will be posted on the Board's web page for reference. (Ms. Young's very comprehensive slide presentation is posted on the County of Berks, Workforce Development Board's web page.)

Highlights of Ms. Young's presentation included:

- Berks County: Labor Market Trends
- Full Employment in Berks County
- Fewer Workers in Berks County
- Smaller Labor Supply in Berks County
- Workforce Churn – Insights from PA Data
- Workforce Churn – Sector Insights from US Data
- Strong but Uneven Wage Growth in Berks Co. (Employment & Wages Services-Providing) (Employment & Wages Goods-Producing)
- Strong but Uneven Wage Growth in Berks Co. (Employment & Average Weekly Earnings)
- Workforce Recovery Varies by Sector
- Berks Co. – Regional Comparison
- EDC's Center for Regional Analysis – Data-driven analytics to identify opportunities, illuminate challenges and drive transformation.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Young for her informative presentation and added that the labor market information he summarized in the COO Update lines up with the data presented by Ms. Young.

- In December 2021 the Berks County unemployment rate stood at 5.1%, down from 6.7% a year earlier. This is slightly better than that of Pennsylvania at 5.4% but still much higher (worse) than the U.S. rate of 3.9% reported for December.
- Continuing the worrisome trend that preceded the pandemic, Berks County unfortunately leads all local labor markets in the Commonwealth in “new hire churn”. Adding to the deep challenges faced by manufacturers, three relatively low wage service sectors together account for over half of the new hires in the quarter but only 11.2% of 163,508 total jobs in the County. They are Administrative and Support Services, Food Services and Drinking Places and Accommodation.

Mr. Fogarty commented that the required Statements of Financial Interests have been received from all but two of the Workforce Development Board members and thanked the members for their diligence in returning their statements which are due by May 1.

Mr. Fogarty also thanked Ms. Noll, Ms. Palmer and Mr. Stevenson on the Board staff who have all stepped up to taking on additional responsibilities since the retirement of Mr. John Moser in January. The Assistant Director’s position has been posted and applications are due by April 1.

Mr. Fogarty next invited for Market Intelligence comments from Board members.

Mr. Rowley commented that up-to-date labor market information is critical for the Board to do its job and suggested the perhaps Ms. Young could return once a year for a presentation. Mr. Fogarty reported that perhaps a presentation could also be scheduled for the Planning Committee.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that labor market information is also important to know how Berks compares to other counties.

Mr. Fogarty reported that an extension to the contract with Lancaster Economic Development Company is being worked on by WDB staff.

There being no public comment, Ms. Gage-Linderman adjourned the meeting at 8:59 a.m. adding that “we will see each other in June in person”.