



GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

Full Board Meeting

Thursday, 3/14/24

1-2:30pm (Hybrid)

Attendees: Danielle McFadden, Tom Raiche, Tracey Meek, Luce Lopez, Brian Chapman, Jean Tchazou, Rasy An, Chris Hayes, John Palmieri, Stephanie Cronin, Judy Burke, Elizabeth McKiernan, Charlene Jancsy, Beth Goguen, Melissa Desroches, and Judy Bower.

Kevin Coughlin, Shannon Norton, Heather Donovan, Cathy Sturtevant, Brian Sok, Hunter Berube, Jessica Bunting, Colleen Gabriel, Jaunita Green

I. Welcome, Call to Order (1:02pm)

Danielle began the meeting, at which a quorum was present, by approving the prior minutes from the December 7th Full Board Meeting. Stephanie Cronin motioned to approve, and Tracey Meek seconded – motion approved.

II. Report of the Chair (Danielle McFadden)

1. Appointment of Review Teams

- Career Center Certification. Kevin let the Board know that the Executive Board will be the Review Team for the Career Center Certification.
- WIOA Youth RFP. The Performance & Opportunity Committee will be the Review Team for the WIOA Youth RFP. Cathy Sturtevant spoke about this process and the timeline below. Charlene Jancsy commented that she would like Cathy to be part of this meeting so she can share her insight. Danielle remarked it is a rewarding experience for all involved, and Kevin thanked the Performance & Opportunities Committee for their involvement.
 - 3/24 RFP issue date
 - 4/4 Bidders conference
 - 5/7 Proposals due
 - 5/8 RFP meeting to discuss preparation
 - 5/13-5/29 Review team to read proposals
 - 5/30 Executive Board to vote
 - 6/13 Full Board to vote

2. New Board Members

- Rasy An is a new Board member for us, and he joined the meeting via Zoom. He thanked Kevin for being invited, and he is glad to return to the Board. He was a past Board member pre-covid. Rasy told the Board he is looking forward to getting to know everyone and would like to volunteer for sub-committees as needed.
- Jean Marc Tchazou is also a new Board member. He thanked Kevin for inviting him to be part of the Board, and he told the Board he is looking forward to working together. Kevin thanked Jean for his service, as he is a veteran. Kevin told the Board that Trinity Care Associates is a for-profit, private organization and is participating in our behavioral health grant.
- Finally, Brandie Anderson from the Walmart Superstore is also a new Board member. Unfortunately, Brandie was not able to join the meeting today. Kevin told the group he is looking forward to working with her and having her as a member of our Board.

3. Re-affirmation of Executive Board Votes

Kevin spoke to the Board about the recent affirmations of the Executive Board from 2/29/24 on the following:

- Updated Career Center Certification Policy (mandatory for compliance)
- Updated Workforce Board By-Laws (mandatory for compliance)
- One Stop Operator – we will be beginning the process only in October, and it will return for a Full Board vote in June 2025.

Betty McKiernan motioned for an affirmation of all 3 votes, Brian Chapman seconded – motion approved.

III. **Report of the Executive Director**

a. Standard Operating Procedures

Kevin told the Board of the work of the WB to develop separate Standard Operating Procedures from the Career Center. There is a difference in roles between guidance on the Workforce Board side and implementation on the Career Center side. We currently have 17 approved SOPs and 8 more relating to monitoring. Some examples of the SOPs we have created are Meeting Checklists, Onboarding New Board Members, Ensuring Data Security, etc. Creating these SOPs has been a good experience for the Workforce Board.

b. Labor – 2024 Youth Apprenticeship Week (5/5-5/11)

Kevin told the Board that the Workforce Board is taking steps to strengthen our apprenticeship programs. We are glad to have representation on our Board with Tom Raiche and Kevin Kelley. We will be creating events here in the Greater Lowell area during Youth Apprenticeship Week and will keep you updated on all of that coming in May.

Tom Raiche affirmed that the potential for a strong apprenticeship program in Greater Lowell is great. Tom mentioned he had just become aware of a “signing event” in another workforce area where graduates are accepted into an apprentice program through a ceremony. Tom felt if we could replicate something similar here, it would be a great way for our community to highlight and fully understand an apprenticeship career pathway. Tom mentioned Chris Antonellis as an ally in our efforts. He is a union member and passionate mentor to young people considering an apprenticeship pathway. Tom feels Chris will be a key player for our team as we build this program.

c. Mandatory Partners Agreement

Jessica spoke about this Agreement between the WB and our 13 Mandatory Partners which will be renewed with Board approval on 6/30/24. The WB acts as the convener of this Agreement as it relates to the operation of the Career Center’s delivery of service in our local workforce area, and we will collaborate with the Mandatory Partners’ Facilitator Shaun McCarthy to produce a new Agreement which will be in place for the next 3 years. Our Mandatory Partners service our most vulnerable priority populations in Greater Lowell, i.e. unemployed, Veterans, individuals in recovery, immigrants, etc. The Partner Agreement is updated every 3 years, and the renewal process includes:

- The WB working closely with the Career Center Managers and Shaun McCarthy to update the current Agreement
- We will get feedback from our 13 Mandatory Partners to produce a final draft of the Agreement
- We will bring this final draft to the Executive Board for a vote (5/30/24)
- We will bring the final draft to all of you on the Full Board for a vote at our next 6/13 meeting
- Finally, the WB will obtain organizational signatures and submit to the City of Lowell’s Chief Elected Official for final signature by 6/30/24

There are many steps in this process, and we are positioned to stay ahead of it. The WB will continue to work closely with the Career Center on this, and specifically with Shaun McCarthy and his positive working relationship with all our 13 Mandatory Partners.

Shaun concurred and let the Board know we will be engaging the Mandatory Partners in the following ways:

- Site visits
- Adding a Mandatory Partners page to the newsletter
- Highlighting one Mandatory Partner monthly

d. Updates

- a. Annual Monitoring. Kevin let the Board know we are using all our resources to maintain a good standing in all our monitorings and compliance.
- b. Transportation. Brian Sok gave the Board an update on our transportation initiative and our work with QRyde. There have been almost 2000 rides to date, and by all measures the initiative is a success. We are working with QRyde to increase ridership and will soon be getting access to shelter operators to help the immigrants. Kevin asked any Board members if you want to try the rider program, we encourage you to do so. He also thanked Stephanie Cronin for allowing us to speak about our transportation initiative with her Board.
- c. Connecting Activities. Colleen Gabriel spoke to the Board about the work of Connecting Activities. CA has placed several students into jobs in education through the HSSIIEP grant and is currently working on placing students into positions through the STEM grant as well. CA has formed a relationship with a farming community, and students are working in environmental technologies at 3 local farms. They have also funded 22 students to go through OSHA and CPR training to prep for work study. Students have also received LinkedIn training at Lowell High School through Connecting Activities.

In addition, CA has had a stronger presence in the middle schools, i.e. The Butler Middle School. CA has held an "Employability Workshop" for 8th graders which was very interactive and fun according to Colleen. They will return to The Butler Middle School in a couple of weeks to run a Resume Workshop. They also held a STEM night at The Butler, which was a good event and helped to engage and inform parents. CA was also present at Lowell High School to attend "focus week" addressing seniors who have no plans after graduation. Jaunita Green, one of Connecting Activities staff members, has been very involved in the Innovation Pathway Program at Chelmsford High School. She is responsible for providing professionals for their Speaker Series as well as hosting an internship assembly for students interested in this pathway. Finally, our CA staff is working at Collegiate Charter School to present a scholarship workshop which will help students get paired with available scholarships. Also on April 11th, the Lowell High School job fair is scheduled and there are currently over 25 businesses signed up to attend.

- d. Regional Blueprint. We received \$100,000 in funding in combination with North Shore and Merrimack Valley workforce boards to work on identifying priority industries. The Workforce Board has contracted the Donahue Institute to research our upcoming needs for training and employment in the region. We will be culminating with a brand-new blueprint in June. This will be the blueprint as to how grants will be accessed in the future.
- e. Annual Report. The Workforce Board, with input from the Career Center, has created an Annual Report which highlights the accomplishments and achievements of the last year as well as recognizing staff members for their hard work. It is currently at the printer, and we plan on distribution of this plan to all of you by April 2024.

IV. Report of the Career Center, Shannon Norton

Shannon spoke about the immigrant crisis and how the Career Center is responding to the large volume of jobseekers. There have been over 143 individuals who are now registered in MassHire's database. They are predominantly Haitian Creole speaking with very limited English as well as limited digital literacy. Our bilingual staff members have been very helpful. Career Center staff have been on site at the Lowell site from 10-4pm Monday through Thursday and twice weekly at the Tewksbury site. The state is providing funding for the costs for staff and equipment however funding runs out on June 30th.

Shaun McCarthy held a “pre-application party”, and 40 people attended. Shaun and his team were able to help individuals finalize their applications to open positions and bring them one step closer to employment. CentiMark, a commercial roofing company in Chelmsford, conducted a follow-up event to help explain how to handle an interview, and the process of applying for positions. CentiMark is planning to hire 8-10 employees, and they have offered to drive them to/from the job site as well. Blair House in Tewksbury is also looking to hire shelter residents to work and will provide transportation.

The Career Center offered pre-testing for ESOL students, however the language barrier is still too large an obstacle for training in a CNA program. Because of this, the Career Center will now begin recruiting for a lesser position, Home Health Aid, and offer a digital literacy course as well.

Shannon relayed to the Board that the government is putting pressure on MassHire to put immigrants to work, and she is hoping that the CC receives more funding for this. They have currently placed more than 40 new workers. Shaun asked the Board to consider this job-seeker pool as they are eager to work.

Shaun concluded with an announcement about an upcoming Fire/Police Event Open House onsite event on 3/26. It is the first time we’ve held this kind of info session event, and we are hoping for a great turnout. Please keep an eye out as we will be promoting it on social media as well.

V. Grant Update

- a. HSSIIEP (\$350,217)
- b. STEM (\$150,000)

Cathy spoke about the above grants and how Connecting Activities is using the funding from these grants to place students in education and STEM fields.

- c. Healthcare (\$2.4M)
- d. Behavioral Health (\$2.2M)

Kevin shared with the Board that we are working together with North Shore and Merrimack Valley workforce boards to start the implementation of these 2 grants. North Shore is the lead on Healthcare and Greater Lowell is the lead on Behavioral Health. The Workforce Board’s Brian Sok will be the lead on implementing the Behavioral Health grant. We will work together with the Career Center to fulfill requirements, get placements, and do recruitments.

Kevin added that we will be working on this grant for the next 3 years, and our research has created understanding in the industry that we believe will be successful. We have had difficulty recruiting for CNA positions, however we have now created a pathway for entry level medical positions to obtain training and work positions that will allow an individual to work toward a higher profession, i.e. LPN, RN, Phlebotomists, Medical Assistant, etc.

Kevin thanked all the employers and training providers who have and will be collaborating with us on this. Our Board members who are involved in this grant are Tracey Meek, Jean Tchazou, Judy Burke, and David Daly. Hunter spoke about writing and submitting the grant, and he thanked the Career Center, and Jessica and Brian for all their hard work in creating a solid submission for approval.

VI. Adjournment

Danielle called for the adjournment of the meeting, and Charlene motioned to approve. It was seconded by Jean Tchazou – motion approved. The meeting ended at 2:12pm.

VII. Next Full Board Meeting

June 13, 2024, 1- 2:30pm