



GREATER LOWELL WORKFORCE BOARD

107 Merrimack St
Lowell, MA 01852
978.937.9816

MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board
June 25, 2020
Meeting via Zoom

Call to Order: 8:02 AM

Presiding Officer: Ray Wrobel, Chair

Attendees: Kimberly Bodkin, Judy Burke, Stephanie Cronin, Jonathan DaSilva, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Beth Goguen, Charlene Jancsy, John Kovach, Maureen Kriff, Michele LaGrega, Nancy Ludwig, Danielle McFadden, Elizabeth McKiernan, John Palmieri, Erin Quinn, Cynthia Smith, Beverly Woods. **Quorum present.**

Guests: Robin Dion, Amy Weatherbee

Staff: Peter Farkas, Alexis Ciccanti, Jay Green, Meelynn Wong, Beatriz Sierra, Shannon Norton, Kathleen Gentile, Cathy Sturtevant

I. Welcome

Chair Wrobel welcomed the group and introduced two new staff Jay Green, Youth Business Services, and Meelynn Wong, Senior Program Manager, and welcomed new board member Erin Quinn from Department of Transitional Assistance.

II. Approval of December 13, 2019 Minutes

Chair Wrobel requested review of the December 13, 2020 minutes. With no comments or questions and a quorum present, Chair Wrobel requested a motion to accept the December 13, 2020 minutes. Motion made by Stephanie Cronin; seconded by Danielle McFadden. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

III. Election of Officers

Mr. Farkas stated according to the bylaws every two year the Board elects the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Second Vice-Chair through a simple majority of the full board. The Chair and Vice-Chair must be representatives of the private sector and the term will be from July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2022.

The nomination process included an email sent to board members on May 28th requesting nominations and responses due by June 10th. The nomination slate was sent in meeting materials on June 18th. The nomination slate was Chair, Ray Wrobel, Align Credit Union; Vice-Chair, Maureen Fitzpatrick, Lowell General Hospital; and Second Vice-Chair, Danielle McFadden, Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Farkas set forth a motion to nominate the slate as presented. Motion made by Stephanie Cronin; seconded Charlene Jancsy. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

IV. WIOA Youth Program Providers Recommendation

Mr. Farkas explained every two years, the board select providers of in-school and out-of-school vendors to provide education, employment and training services to low income youth. A minimum of 75% of funding must be allocated to out-of-school youth and 25% to in-school youth. Five proposals were received for consideration – 4 out-of-school and 1 in-school. The request is for the Full Board vote to approve the FY21 WIOA Youth Proposal Review Sub-Committee recommendations.

The RFP was issued April 20th, proposal due date was May 22nd, and the review committee met early June with the Contract start date July 1st. The proposals that are being recommended for funding best meet the requirements set forth in the RFP as well as WIOA. Four out-of-school proposals and one in-school proposal are being recommended for funding.

Proposed funding and enrollment slots and recommended funding and enrollment slots were reviewed for the five providers selected - in-school provider Greater Lowell Technical High School and out-of-school providers CTI YouthBuild, International Institute of New England, Lowell Career Center, and Middlesex Community College. Greater Lowell Tech and International Institute of New England are new proposals.

We experienced a 13.4% cut in WIOA Youth funding so when the RFP was put out the funding available was higher than what it ended up being. This is why the recommended funding is reduced from the proposed funding. This funding will be for the first year and we will continue to fund the programs based on what Department of Labor funding is provided for the second year.

Mr. Farkas set forth motion to accept the proposal review committee FY21 In-school and Out-of-School youth providers recommendation as presented. Motion made by Ray Wrobel; seconded Maureen Fitzpatrick. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

V. MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board Report

Impact of COVID-19

Mr. Farkas reviewed the impact of COVID-19 and unemployment rates. Massachusetts unemployment rate is 16.3% and for Greater Lowell it is 16.4%. Before COVID-19 the highest unemployment rate we had was 3.1% and now it is 17.4% in Dracut. In regard to the unemployment rate we are about right in the middle compared to the other 16 workforce regions.

An overview of the number of Greater Lowell residents filing new unemployment claims per week ending March 21st – May 30th was then provided. There was a peak on March 28th with 6066 Greater Lowell residents filing claims and the number slightly decreased every week through May 16th. About 38,000 total Greater Lowell residents filed unemployment claims during that timeframe. This number does not include Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Claims the self-employed or those working in the gig economy.

Mr. Farkas reviewed the profile of Greater Lowell Claimants during April and May including information concerning sex, education, and wages. It appears the Pandemic has impacted females more (55%), the lower educated (80% had less than a Bachelor's), and the lower earning workers more (56% earned less than \$36,400 annually). The four industries with the highest number of layoffs are Healthcare & Social Assistance (16%), Accommodation & Food Services (15%), Retail (11%), and Construction (11%).

A snapshot of how COVID-19 affected priority industries was then reviewed. Charts highlighting top occupations in the Manufacturing, Healthcare & Social Assistance, and IT were displayed showing number of job postings that were posted pre COVID-19 (April 1 – June 22, 2019) compared to number of job postings that were posted post COVID-19 (April 1 – June 22, 2020) according to Burning Glass.

FY'21 Federal Funding Overview

Mr. Farkas provided an overview of the Federal Funding. Some of the total funding is through the Department of Labor – Adult, Dislocated Worker (customers on unemployment), and Youth. The last six years we have slowly seen a decline in funding. Just from last year to this year FY'20 – FY'21 we saw a decrease of \$154,000. Since FY'16 we've seen a decrease in funding of \$642,932. If there is less funding we send less customers to training and we generally serve less people. These federal funding allocations were decided prior to COVID-19 and therefore were based more off a 2.5% unemployment rate and therefore does not currently align to the current 16% unemployment rate. We are optimistic that there will be supplemental funding from the federal government to address impact of COVID-19.

Currently we are awaiting annual plan guidance from the state. We will be putting together an annual plan in the future that will begin July 1st. Once the annual plan is completed it will be reviewed with the Workforce Performance & Opportunities Committee to approve the career center performance goals including number of job seekers served and number of employer services. Then it will be put forth to the Executive Committee to approve the budget, including potential transfer, and final plan before submission. The potential transfer refers to the supplemental funds we have to address the Adult population – we will request to shift funding to the Dislocated Worker population. This will be put forth to the Executive Committee to approve the transfer.

Mr. Farkas requested a motion to allow the Board's Executive Committee the authority to approve the FY21 Annual plan including the FY21 budget. Motion made by Danielle McFadden; seconded by Elizabeth McKiernan. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Vote: Unanimous.

Resource & Grant Development

Mr. Farkas explained we have been good bringing in additional funding knowing that the core federal funding had been decreasing. A review of additional funding was provided which included funding from the Retention Project, Commonwealth Corporation: Summer YouthWorks, Commonwealth Corporation: Year-Round YouthWorks, Dept. of Transitional Assistance – Young Parent Program, Commonwealth Corporation: Re-Entry Machining Training Program, and Dept. of Housing and Community Development.

Upcoming meetings

Education & Training Provider Meeting – June 29th
Northeast Regional Planning Meeting – June 30th
Board Meeting – September 17th – hosted by MRC pending COVID-19 status
Board Meeting – December 10th – location TBD

VI. MassHire Lowell Career Center Report – Shannon Norton

MassHire Award nominations

Three nominations were submitted for the MassHire Award and all three were selected as finalists. Amy Veillette for her work with NAMC – “reliability.” Kelly Higgins for her work with the Career Academy – “respect.” Tim O’Connor for his work with implementing Bullhorn and Career Portal – “ingenuity.” The award winners will be announced July 23rd. If we win the career center receives \$10,000 and the finalists present their work to statewide partners.

Pivot to remote services and assistance with unemployment claims

The Career Center staff transitioned to working from home on 3/23. Only Managers and Supervisors stayed in the office, and all staff were trained on Zoom and using webmail. All in person workshops transitioned to Webinars and the limit for participants were increased to 1,000 to let other areas utilize the webinars. All staff were given laptops, headphones, and any documents that they needed to work from home. 18 state and about 11 local staff transitioned and were trained to assist with UI claims. The career center Summer jobs programs has transitioned to mostly virtual with only 42 youth in on-site worksites this year, and about 190 other youth doing virtual project-based work, career readiness, and workshops.

Ms. Norton continued to present how the Career Center is transitioning to Virtual Services. Career Center Customer Orientations are being delivered three times a week. Customers can request a meeting with a Career Advisor after becoming a member either through Zoom or by phone. Documents for eligibility can be mailed or sent via a secure e-mail. Career readiness workshops will be given to customers in certain grants via Zoom, Workplace from Facebook is being used, and weekly meetings with staff are being done via Zoom. The State have given the Career Center two Web-ex licenses and Tim has been attending weekly state IT meetings on virtual services.

VII. Adjourn

Chair Wrobel thanked everyone for attending. The Chair asked if there was any other business. Seeing none, the Chair requested a motion to adjourn. With no other business, motion made by Danielle McFadden; seconded by Stephanie Cronin. All in favor? Yes. Opposed? No. Unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 AM.