

Bucks County Department of Workforce and Economic Development

Workforce Development Board Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: March 23, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

Teleconference

In Attendance

Board of Directors: Jim Horan, Mateen Afzal, Paul Bencivengo, Anita Diggs, Ted Dorand, Marybeth Ferguson, Dr. Felicia Ganther, Louis Kassa, Greg Krug, Chris LaBonge, Jonathan Mercer, Jessica Peiffer, Dr. Benjamin Rusiloski*, Dominic Roberto, Brian Shields, Sara Tsivikis, Yolonda Udvardy, Jeane Vidoni, Jennifer Wendling

**New board member*

Bucks County WED Staff: Billie Barnes, Alice Colyar, Michael Gilmore, Brittney Jones, Dianna Kralle, Andrea Walls

Guests: Brian Cummings, Andre Hardy, Greg Hart, Susan Herring, Tara Loew, Larry Melf, Stephanie Perry, Jessica Peterson, Robert Pisko, Vince Sangmeister, Adina Tayar, Kerry Twomey

Next Meeting: June 22, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

Location: TBD

Agenda Discussion

I. Welcome & Call to Order, Jim Horan

Jim Horan, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. and greeted attendees. Dianna Kralle announced that a quorum was present.

II. Meeting Minutes, Jim Horan

Mr. Horan directed board members to review the meeting minutes from December 15, 2021, and thanked Kris Shovlin for the Board meeting packet. Mr. Horan requested a motion to approve the meeting minutes from December 15, 2021.

Action/Vote: Mateen Afzal made the motion. Jeane Vidoni seconded the motion. All were in favor; none opposed.

III. New Board Member/Staff Introduction, Jim Horan

Mr. Horan welcomed Dr. Benjamin Rusiloski, President of Delaware Valley University, to the board. Brittney Jones joined the WED team as Project Manager, and Deanna Giorno resigned her position as Economic Development Manager to pursue new opportunities. Ms. Jones introduced herself to the board, stating her work overseeing American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds and county knowledge as an asset to her work with WED. Mr. Horan wished all success in their future endeavors.

IV. SkillUp™ PA, Kerry Twomey (in place of Ryan Hyde)

Stephanie Perry, Special Project Director at the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, introduced Kerry Twomey from Metrix Learning. Ms. Twomey began the presentation and spoke about the launch of [SkillUp™ PA](#), which launched in the summer of 2021 to provide access to free online job skills training to Pennsylvania residents. Courses are available on the Metrix Learning Portal and can be accessed by registering for a free account on the PA CareerLink® website. There have been 7,500 registrations plus an additional 5,000 registrations through local portals. Metrix Learning is a WIOA-supported platform and an online learning management system that helps jobseekers upgrade their skills and gain certifications to secure employment. It complies with reporting requirements and has CWDS integration with 6,000+ courses, ten career pathways, and 200 in-demand occupations. Approximately 85 percent of courses are mobile compatible. In addition to skill assessments and skill gap remediation, 130+ industry certifications are offered.

User benefits include:

- Courses are free.
- Available 24/7.
- Allows job seekers to acquire or upgrade skills that local employers want.
- Tech support is available by email and phone Monday through Friday to assist with troubleshooting and help users who may have deficits in digital literacy.

Benefits at the local level include:

- Access to a dashboard and administrative reports.
- Access to online workforce development board applications.
- Offers behavioral emails to increase engagement.

Ms. Twomey concluded the presentation with questions from board members. Greg Krug asked if the platform helps users with seeking higher education opportunities. Ms. Twomey responded that it is a self-service tool to connect users with their local workforce development board (LWDB)s for referrals. Ms. Perry added that LWDBs could expend additional costs for job seekers to access a MED Comm catalog.

Alice Colyar asked if the platform allows users to access specialized programs such as phlebotomy. Ms. Perry confirmed users could connect with local employers, trade schools, and community colleges.

Paul Bencivengo asked if a user must [log in](#) to see a course listing. Ms. Twomey responded that course listings could be accessed by logging in and referred to a [five-minute navigation video](#) that assists users with this process.

Chris LaBonge asked what the onboarding process for employers is. Ms. Twomey responded that Metrix Learning provides guided training on using the platform, connects them with their LWDB, and helps them set up a PA CareerLink® account to launch SkillUp™. Additionally, skill gaps are addressed, and custom clusters are identified on a one-on-one basis. Instructions for setting up a portal are provided. Ms. Perry recommended the [SkillUp™ digital toolkit](#) for reference and more information and provided her email address (stperry@pa.gov).

V. Statewide Apprenticeships Initiatives, Tara Loew

Tara Loew, Director of the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office, introduced herself to the board. She joined the ATO in November 2020 after serving in an LWDB and working in secondary education. The state apprenticeship agency serves the West, Central, Northern, and Southeast regions. The ATO has grown to 18 staff members and training representatives.

Ms. Loew began her presentation with the definition of "sansdemc": without people. Hastened by the COVID pandemic, the sansdemc has grown from its pre-existing conditions:

- A mass exodus of 29 million boomers who are out of the workforce.
- Record-low labor force participation rate (LFPR) of prime-age Americans.
- Lowest birth rates in US history in 2019, representing a 35-year low.

These conditions have resulted in a rethinking of strategies, a more people-centered approach, investments in the workforce, and increased efforts to retain workers. Apprenticeship is a flagship model for re- and up-skilling workers and closing employers' skills gap. It is a learn-as-you-earn model lasting one to six years with structured on-the-job training and classroom learning.

Apprenticeship programs consist of five core components: direct business involvement, on-the-job training, related instruction, rewards for skill gains, and completion, resulting in a national occupation credential. Registered pre-apprenticeships involve fundamental skills needed to enter an apprenticeship. They are a fast track to apprenticeship and offer a direct pathway with an approved curriculum and training.

Why choose apprenticeship?

- Closes skills gap and creates safer workplaces.
 - Results in highly skilled employees.
 - Ensures knowledge is passed down to the new workforce.
- Tools to address inequities in income and opportunity.
 - Allows people to earn a salary while learning.
- A career vs. a job.
 - The average salary for completers is \$70k annually.
- Employee retention and return on investment.
 - 94 percent of apprentices stay with the employers who trained them (USDOL).
 - The average return on investment is \$1.47 for \$1.00.
- State and federal commitment and funding support.
 - Gov. Wolf – \$28 million through the ATO.
 - Biden Administration – has committed to significantly expanding apprenticeships.

How does WIOA advance the use of registered apprenticeship?

- Names registered apprenticeship representatives to LWDBs.
- Pennsylvania's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) – program sponsors automatic eligibility.
- Promotion of work-based learning to meet the need for skilled workers.
- WIOA supports apprenticeships for youth.
- Positively impacts workforce system outcomes across key performance measures and indicators: employment, retention, earnings, and credential attainment.

Goals and enhancements include:

- Application improvements
- Inclusive of all program types
- Digital footprints: user-friendly new website tabs for easy navigation and a regional map
- Employers: basics, benefits, and resources

Since 2016, more traditional and non-traditional fields have been added, including 83 in education, 71 in healthcare, and 64 in technology.

Ms. Loew can be reached at 717-787-6997 or tloew@pa.gov.

Mateen Afzal asked if there were resources to guide employers. Ms. Loew suggested the [Employer webpage](#), where a "How to Get Started" one-pager is available along with a guide to creating a registered apprenticeship in PA. Staff is also available to provide one-on-one support.

Jon Mercer asked if there was pushback from employers due to paperwork involved and cited his uncle's experience with his floor installation business. Ms. Loew responded that the ATO supports the act of investing 144 hours of education and training for apprenticeship and how this contributes long-term to the employer's bottom line. The ATO team is available to support employers in completing necessary paperwork. Group-sponsored models involve multiple employers under one umbrella and encourage each other to adhere to the apprenticeship model, which can benefit small businesses. In this model, someone is identified as the main point of contact, and a committee is established with employer and employee representation.

VI. Upcoming Projects, Billie Barnes

Billie Barnes spoke about WED's receipt of statewide activity funds to support paid speakers for WED Talks, which will help increase participation and engagement. She encouraged board members to participate by registering for upcoming WED Talks on May 11 and June 8. Only two board members participated in the WED Talk on March 16, stressing the importance of attending future WED Talk webinars. The next WED Talk, scheduled on April 7, will be announced next week.

On May 11, the topic will be "Global Supply Chains in a Post-Pandemic World." Renowned expert Mark Millar will discuss Supply Chain 2025, reflect on COVID disruptions, and explore how China's changing role, logistics sector dynamics, and the Ukraine crisis will impact the future of post-pandemic supply chains. He will conclude with ten practical strategies for business leaders to thrive in the "Next Normal."

On June 8, Eric Papp will present "Managing Multiple Priorities in a Hybrid Work Environment." People everywhere are feeling the pressure of time, especially as they adjust to a hybrid work environment. The COVID pandemic has challenged them with doing more with less: Navigating changes, meeting deadlines for projects, and dealing with the increasing complexity of life. All of this can be overwhelming. Having the right thinking tools can make the difference between continued success and constant struggle. Participants will leave feeling confident and in control of having practical solutions to help them cut through complexity.

Ms. Barnes expressed appreciation for the board's participation in reviewing proposals for the Welding Certificate Program on March 17 and the Workforce Outreach Campaign on March 21.

Ms. Barnes reviewed plans for ARPA allocations. Of the \$121 million awarded to the County of Bucks, \$5 million has been allocated to the Bucks County Workforce Development Board. A large portion of the funding will support re-entry initiatives, including Behind the Walls, help with resumes, interviewing skills, and renovations to the prison library to develop a job training center.

Other ARPA allocations include:

- \$800k – Workforce on Wheels initiative to create mobile services
- \$400k – Youth programs
- \$400k – On-the-Job Training/Incumbent Worker Training/Individual Training Accounts
- \$200k – Apprenticeships
- \$125k – Employer Training Cohorts
- \$125k – Entrepreneurship
- \$120k – Frontline/Essential Worker signing bonus
- \$80k – Supportive services
- \$90k – Outreach initiatives
- 10% – Staffing

The County of Bucks and PA CareerLink® Bucks County will host a countywide job fair on April 27, from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Administration Building in Doylestown. Eight departments will be represented: Emergency Services, Parks and Recreation, Board of Elections, Information Technology, Children & Youth, Neshaminy Manor, Corrections, and General Services. Ms. Barnes asked board members to share social media posts about the event from PA CareerLink® [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Relocation of PA CareerLink® Bucks County from Bristol to the facility on Street Road will be added to the Commissioners' Agenda on April 20 for approval. A physical move is anticipated at the end of July. Further information will be available after the lease is formally executed.

VII. Fiscal Updates, Jim Horan

Mr. Horan directed board members to focus on the LWDA PY21 budget YTD Q2 October to December 2021 FSR. WED is in compliance with the state across categories, including adult, youth, and dislocated workers, highlighted in green. Allocations are also in good standing. Timing differences are being accounted for where they are present and are reviewed with the Finance Committee.

Michael Gilmore acknowledged the steep curve associated with learning county processes during the transition. WED has caught up with timing issues over the past year despite these challenges.

Mr. Horan referred to the grant dashboard as an overview of funding sources. This document, which lists where funding originates and how it is allocated, will be produced for board meetings.

Mr. Horan requested a motion to approve the LWDA PY21 budget YTD Q2 October to December 2021 FSR.

Action/Vote: Greg Krug made the motion. Ted Dorand seconded the motion. All were in favor; none opposed.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

IX. General Discussion

Brian Cummings stated that he is a point of contact for any questions about SkillUp™ PA. Mr. Cummings and Ms. Colyar are the local contacts for this platform.

X. Adjournment, Jim Horan

Mr. Horan thanked all attendees and requested a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Action/Vote: Ms. Vidoni made the motion. Dr. Felicia Ganther seconded the motion. All were in favor; none opposed.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Andrea Walls

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March 23, 2022

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