



**NIAGARA COUNTY  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

Joel Feuerman, Chairperson  
Bonnie Rice, Executive Director

Trott Career Center  
1001 Eleventh Street  
Niagara Falls, NY 14301-1201  
Phone: (716) 278-8251  
Fax: (716) 278-8149

**Meeting Minutes – September 14, 2021**  
**ZOOM Conference: Video and Audio Conference**

**Members Present:** Michael Casale, Lindsay Collins, Joel Feuerman, John Hartwell, Jennifer Jackson, John Lang, Cathy Lattanzio, Michael Martin, Dennis Martinez, David Miller, Bob Palka, John Scherrer, Tom Seaman, Suzanne Shears, Todd Zyra

**Members Excused:** William Carroll, Kory Schuler

**Members Absent:** Katie Bongiovanni, Paul Brown, Kathleen Granchelli, Tom Grzebinski, Tim Lederhaus, Kevin McCabe, Shawn Williams, Jerald Wolfgang

**WDB Staff:** Helen Dennis, Joanne Klemer, Bonnie Rice

**Guests/Staff Present:** Donald Jablonski – Niagara County Employment & Training, Melinda Mack – Executive Director of the NY Association of Training and Employment Professionals

**I. Call to Order**

Due to the nature of Zoom and recorded meetings, Executive Director Bonnie Rice conducted the meeting with Chair Joel Feuerman's permission. The meeting was called to order by B. Rice at 8:00 a.m. through video and audio-conferencing using ZOOM. The meeting was recorded, and notes were taken to later be available on the Niagara WDB website. B. Rice noted that due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Sunshine Laws for New York State had been waived. Advertisements for the meeting were placed in local newspapers and online so that the public would be able to attend. B. Rice noted that no requests were made by the public to attend today. H. Dennis took attendance. Attendance is listed above. Quorum was present. The agenda and informational materials were distributed to members through email prior to the meeting.

**II. Old Business**

B. Rice reviewed the agenda items section by section:

**A.** Meeting minutes for June 8, 2021: Board Members received the meeting minutes in the informational materials emailed prior to the meeting. B. Rice asked the Board for a motion to approve the June minutes as presented. Motion made by D. Miller. Second by J. Lang.

**Unanimous vote in favor of approval of the June 8, 2021 meeting minutes.**

**B.** August 19, 2021 Executive Committee Meeting were presented as a matter of record to the Board. No vote was necessary.

**III. Old Business – Previously Approved by WDB Executive Committee**

All information regarding each item was distributed to the Board members through email prior to the meeting. B. Rice informed the Board that the items would be voted in a Slate Vote. The items were previously approved by the WDB Executive Committee.



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B. Rice reviewed with the Board the NYSGVP Grant (related items A-C) which is provided by NYS to certain areas in the State that have been affected by gun violence. The grant money is to help put youth (ages 18-24) to work who live in those specific zip codes. B. Rice stated that for Niagara, at least 75% of youth living in Niagara Falls will be served under this grant and up to 25% of youth living in the City of Lockport. The WDB with NCET have submitted to NYS that we will provide 50 youth to become direct hires at businesses locally. The youth need to reside in the specific zip codes, but the jobs opportunities do not. There will be a 90% reimbursement of wages to employers for the time to train the youth in the job (as new direct hires). B. Rice explained that NCET will need to meet with the youth and the business prior to the youth being hired. Once the business is vetted and the youth is hired, NCET will be able to provide the youth services through the grant relating to what they need for work such as transportation, hygiene packs, interview outfits and other items for work (work boots, safety glasses, etc.) as well as wrap-around services from our partners and local agencies. The grant also provides youth the opportunity for short-term classroom training to connect them to work. B. Rice explained that the goal is to have 50 youth, directly hired by July 31, 2022. The grant also allows for laptops and Wi-Fi hot spots if they are needed for training. B. Rice shared that NCET is eager to get the program up and running. B. Rice informed the Board that the program will ramp up this December and January. B. Rice opened the floor for questions. None brought forward.

B. Rice reviewed the policies with the Board:

- A. NYSGVP Grant OJT Policy:** The NYSGVP OJT Policy is based on the current WIOA OJT policy. However, the NYSGVP OJT Policy is streamlined. It differs by allowing youth to work 30+ hours per week, businesses are to pay youth minimum wage or greater, age range is only 18-24 years old, and youth must reside in the previously mentioned Niagara Falls or Lockport ZIP Codes. As mentioned earlier, there is a 90% reimbursement for wages. Up to \$4,000 can be reimbursed.
- B. NYSGVP Grant Youth Incentives Policy:** The NYSGVP Youth Incentives Policy would allow for youth participants to earn up to \$175 upon completion of the applicable incentives listed within the policy. These incentives are intended to encourage participant involvement and to reward individuals for achievement. These incentives will help the youth achieve work related goals.
- C. NYSGVP Grant Youth Supportive Services Policy:** The NYSGVP Youth Supportive Services Policy is intended to address the needs of NYSGVP Youth programs, in consultation with the One-Stop Partners and other community agencies, to ensure resource and service coordination in the local area.

Item D is not connected to the NYSGVP grant.

- D. With the addition of the WIOA-funded SYEP Grant,** the TES Staffing contract will need to be increased to cover youth wages and payroll service costs from \$1,000,000 to \$1,150,000 through a contract amendment.

B. Rice opened the floor for questions.

J. Feuerman stated that 2-3 years ago there was a need to expand and capture grants so better services could be provided to the local area. J. Feuerman noted that a great job has been done by WDB staff to get these grants and increase the ability to serve people.



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B. Rice thanked J. Feuerman and stated that part of the grant opportunities is due to the economy, that New York State and the Federal Government sees the desperate need for workers and the desperate need to reengage businesses as well.

B. Rice asked for a motion to approve as a slate the items previously approved by the WDB Executive Committee. Motion made by T. Zyra. Second by J. Hartwell. All in favor. No abstentions. **Unanimous vote for the approval of the slate vote of items previously approved by the WDB Executive Committee.**

#### **IV. New Business**

- A.** B. Rice informed the Board that there was one nominee for each WDB Chair and Vice Chair positions. The nominee for WDB Chair is Joel Feuerman. The nominee for WDB Vice Chair is Kory Schuler. K. Schuler was not on the call but has agreed to serve again as Vice Chair if appointed. B. Rice opened the floor for further nominations. None brought forward. B. Rice asked for a motion for Joel Feuerman as WDB Chair. Motioned made by M. Casale. Second by B. Palka. All in favor. J. Feuerman abstains. **Unanimous vote for the approval of J. Feuerman as the WDB Chair.** J. Feuerman thanked the Board for the opportunity to further chair the WDB. B. Rice informed the Board that Kory Schuler was the only nominee for Vice Chair. B. Rice opened the floor for further nominations. None brought forward. B. Rice asked for a motion to approve Kory Schuler as WDB Vice Chair. Motion made by B. Palka. Second by J. Feuerman. All in favor. No abstentions. **Unanimous vote for the approval of K. Schuler as the WDB Vice Chair.**
- B.** B. Rice shared with the Board that the CRT Demand Occupation List needs to be updated to include Heavy Equipment Operator as an in-demand career for our local area. B. Rice asked for a motion to approve the CRT Demand Occupation list. Motion made by T. Seaman. Second by D. Miller. No questions. All in favor. No abstentions. **Unanimous vote for the approval of adding Heavy Equipment Operator to the CRT Demand Occupation List.**
- C.** B. Rice explained that NYS DOL provided Technical Advisory 21-05 and changed regulations allowing for remote monitoring. Staff is able to have Zoom Meetings and send documentation for review by scan and email securely with personal identifiable information protected. Revisions have been made to the WDB Monitoring Plan which was included in the informational packet prior to the meeting for review. B. Rice requested a motion to approve the WDB Monitoring Plan changes. Motion made by J. Feuerman. Second by J. Hartwell. B. Rice opened the floor for questions. None brought forward. All in favor. No abstentions. **Unanimous approval for the revisions to the WDB Monitoring Plan.**

#### **V. Guest Speaker: Melinda Mack, Executive Director of the NY Association of Training and Employment Professionals – The Future of Work in New York State.**

B. Rice introduced Melinda Mack as a guest speaker. Melinda is the Executive Director of the NY Association of Training and Employment Professionals, a nationally-recognized, statewide workforce development association focused on poverty, education, job training, economic and workforce development in New York State. Melinda is an advocate for the Workforce Development Boards at the State and Federal level. Melinda is a co-lead in the Invest in Skills New York, which provided \$175M from NYS to invest in our State and grow our economy. B. Rice turned the floor over to M. Mack.



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M. Mack shared that her goal was to give the members a sense of what is happening at the State and Federal level, how the landscape has changed within the space of workforce development, how we're looking forward to the future in terms of shifting programs, how workforce development is approached and, most importantly, having enough people trained for the jobs in demand now and in the future. M. Mack stated that she would be sharing data with the Board and encouraged questions from members.

- Federal level:
  - Biden Administration making investments to speed up economic recovery.
  - Missing investment in education, job training and employment services.
  - Currently there is an infrastructure package considered for reconciliation process
    - \$80B in package for Workforce Development, huge for Workforce Development system.
      - \$16B to support Dislocated Workers (individuals who lost jobs because of the pandemic and long-term unemployed)
      - \$15B to WIOA
      - Sectoral and industry based partnerships
    - There was 50% more money 20 years ago compared to now, funding has been continuously ratcheting down
  - Currently we have open jobs and people who need employment, still a mismatch
  - Lots of reasons people are not, or cannot stay employed
  - With pushing for infrastructure, infrastructure jobs – need skilled people to do the jobs
    - Existing people who are in employment and people to recruit
      - Upskilling or supporting people to get into a trade or profession
      - Need to have people ready to do the work
  - WIOA is up for reauthorization
    - Potential to add/change/shift laws under WIOA
    - Different groups meeting to discuss/offer changes
    - If Board members have ideas, reach out to Bonnie
    - 4 members of US Congress on committee, advocating and listening on our behalf
  - Economic Development Administration has money suddenly for Workforce Development
    - Good Jobs Challenge – coordinate and increase economic development and workforce development
      - Opportunity to do something with partners across the region
- State Level
  - Changes in Albany, new governor
    - Working to understand Governor Hochul's plans and direction for workforce development
  - Significant challenges as a State
    - Unemployment rate down, yet still high



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- Niagara County 6% unemployment rate, may be closer to 10% based on data from this morning. 22% at height of pandemic
    - Higher for anyone who is recently not working and not looking for a job, those individuals are not currently being counted in published unemployment rate
- Fastest growing jobs pre-pandemic paid less than \$32K/year, made up to close to 2M occupations in NYS
  - Challenge pre-pandemic to wages
    - Wages to meet everyday living needs
  - Niagara County median income is around \$36K/year
    - Illustrates the likelihood that one of two (or both) adults in a household are making less than minimum wage.
- Across NYS 42% of New Yorkers have a High School Diploma or less
  - If you need more than HSD for employment 42% of New Yorkers will not be able to get hired
  - Mismatch between skills and education, workforce development system trying to alleviate
- Things to keep in mind:
  - Expectations from employees have changed
    - Polling – 55% NY workers expect flexibility to work from home and would chose to quit if they did not have flexibility
  - Speeding up of automation
    - Investments from employers for automating systems
  - Expectation to access things virtually
    - Investment in occupations that allow training online
  - Think about jobs of future and jobs we need now
    - Fastest growing occupations are in Tech – AI, Web Services, Customer Support, etc. we do not have enough training across the State
    - Less than 15-20 providers that do credentials supporting Tech Occupations or Computer Coding
    - Expect to see clean energy investment, tech investments, infrastructure in next state budget
- Open floor for questions/comments
  - J. Feuerman asked question regarding soft skill training and the plan for it.
    - M. Mack shared that soft skills have always been an issue, significant challenge. Remediation – early and often in work experience. Lack of opportunity for young adults for work experience
    - Work readiness component in training programs, embedded within work experience
      - Needs to be done in partnership with employers
    - Example: Tompkins County – working with county and a group of manufacturers to recruit 25-50 employees to come into their facilities.





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Embedded is OJT and up-front work experience program – getting paid to learn how to work. Employers are finding it to be worth it, employees are sticking around before getting to hard skills training which is the expensive component

- B. Rice added many jobs are introducing AI where you wouldn't expect it
  - Robots performing routine tasks, AI doing portion of jobs such as routine accounting
  - For employers – if you can't find employees, where do you go? Turn to AI?
- M. Mack issue we haven't talked about – size of population
  - People aren't having big families anymore
  - Open jobs with not enough bodies
- Closing: NYATEP's State of the Workforce report to be released in early October, including pre-pandemic and post-pandemic numbers. Reach out to B. Rice if further questions for M. Mack.

## **VI. Informational Items**

- A. B. Rice reviewed with the Board the NYS GVP as previously discussed in the meeting. The WIOA-SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program) is a summer grant to hire 40 youth in Niagara County to work and pay their wages through TES Staffing. They learn work readiness skills, get transportation assistance and wrap-around services. B. Rice informed the Board that additional money received for this grant will be used to run a program that mimics the State requirements for the TANF SYEP (summer) program. The program runs to December 31, 2021. Youth need to live within the city of Niagara Falls. The grant is for \$122,000. B. Rice shared with the Board that if any member would like to be a work site or hire youth to contact her to discuss the program and parameters. This offers more youth in our area the opportunity to work. B. Rice reviewed the Disaster Recovery-National Dislocated Worker Grant in which the WDB was awarded \$40,000 to reimburse local employers for wages for individuals they hired during the pandemic and paid to do pandemic related job duties. B. Rice shared that the funding will be used for four local businesses who responded to inquiries through NCET, Niagara USA Chamber, and Niagara County IDA/Economic Development. B. Rice opened the floor for questions. None brought forward.
- B. D. Jablonski gave his One-Stop System Operator update.
- Jablonski thanked Melinda Mack for her time and expressed appreciation for her comments today. D. Jablonski reflected on J. Feuerman's comment regarding soft skills and work readiness training. D. Jablonski shared that NCET engages customers in soft skills training periodically and has had great success with in-person workshops and discussions. Regarding advertising and marketing, NCET is working on grants that do not involve WIOA or the State in order to get word out regarding career fairs, hiring events, workshops and other services.
  - D. Jablonski shared that the TANF SYEP summer youth program has put 96 youth to work and majority are on payroll until the end of September. The separate WIOA-SYEP grant already has 26 enrollees out of the 40 needed.



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- D. Jablonski also shared that three career fairs have been run by NCET in North Tonawanda, on the front lawn of the Trott Building in Niagara Falls, and in Lockport. A fourth will be run on September 22<sup>nd</sup> at Oppenheim Park in North Tonawanda. Of the 50 spots, there is only one opening left. It is anticipated that a few hundred job seekers will attend. So far NCET has helped put 147 people to work this year. D. Jablonski shared with the Board members that if they have businesses with job openings to please contact NCET and they will share more information regarding OJT contracts, job orders and any other services offered to businesses.
  - D. Jablonski informed the Board that DOL is now back in the Trott Building and NCET is hoping this will generate more traffic to the center. NCET is also excited to have DOL back as they are a valuable partner to the center.
  - There will be a One Stop Partners meeting September 29<sup>th</sup>.
  - Regarding OJT contracts: 39 contracts to date, already one more than last year. Regarding CRT: funded 75 participants for training this year. This is approaching a record number.
  - EFS Grant (Probation Grant): reached maximum funding for the third year in a row. Program is pay-for-success and allows NCET to work with probationers to prevent recidivism by ensuring they find work and after 90 days are still employed. D. Jablonski mentioned that this is a very important grant for \$215,000 and works in unison with Niagara County Probation. EFS Grant will be renewed for 2022.
  - D. Jablonski shared with the Board that the Career Center is fully open from 8:30-4 Monday – Friday and has been open throughout the pandemic.
  - D. Jablonski shared his contact information and opened the floor for questions. None brought forward.
- C. Youth Committee Update: B. Rice shared the Youth Committee met on September 8<sup>th</sup> and discussed current WIOA Youth grants (previously discussed above).
- D. D. Martinez updated the Board regarding the Inclusion Committee.
- The Inclusion Committee is hosting a virtual business panel discussion November 3<sup>rd</sup> focusing on DEI: What, How and Why to focus on retention issues in a diverse workforce, people with disabilities or people who may be developing disability, and what we can do to help retain an employee on the job in terms of accommodations. D. Martinez shared that there will be a panel of employers who have experience with these situations, as well as a representative from the Center for Assistive Technology to talk about low cost, low tech, easy accommodations for someone who may be experiencing work difficulties because of a medical condition, which can happen to anyone. D. Martinez stated that with this discussion the Inclusion Committee hopes to give businesses that are attending a run-down of the services available to help them diversify their workforce in terms of the largest untapped labor pool (people with disabilities). D. Martinez hopes to see as many businesses as possible at the discussion. More information will be available soon.
  - B. Rice shared that the Inclusion Committee is hoping to make people aware that even small accommodations can be made to keep a person from having to leave your workforce. Retention is more cost effective than having to go through the hiring and training process to hire a new employee.



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- E. B. Rice shared the WIOA Youth Program (operated in-house with NCET) update: 75 planned youth enrollments for the year. As of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 58 youth have been enrolled.
- F. B. Rice opened the floor to Board Members who would like to make an announcement or update the Board.
- M. Casale shared regarding his previous update at the last Board Meeting. M. Casale stated that Niagara County is involved with the Regional Council Working Group to submit a proposal for Build Back Better while working with Invest Buffalo Niagara (regional business attraction organization) on a proposal for a number of issues for the initial application to be submitted by October 19<sup>th</sup>. The proposal looks at items such as efforts that will lead to a better aligned workforce, workforce pipeline for advanced manufacturing, expanded efforts to bring underrepresented communities into industry, and improving the local inventory of manufacturing sites to enable business expansions (mentioned at last meeting). M. Casale stated that the region is losing too many opportunities because we don't have the inventory of sites and buildings in WNY to compete with other communities like Pittsburg PA, Columbus OH and communities similar to WNY. M. Casale shared that UB Regional Institute is taking the lead along with Invest Buffalo Niagara, other partners and stake holders.
  - B. Rice commented that Niagara County has a good and integrated workforce and economic development system, while some other areas do not. This helps to make things happen here quickly. B. Rice asked M. Casale if D. Jablonski was a part of one of the committees for the grant. M. Casale stated that D. Jablonski is working with one of the Jobs Challenge groups. D. Jablonski confirmed.
  - M. Casale thanked D. Jablonski for the work and programs with WorksourceOne and the On-the-Job Training, Customized Training, and other workforce development programs. M. Casale also shared that at a recent presentation at the Town of Somerset and Village of Barker Boards he had the opportunity to share information about WorksourceOne and Niagara County Employment and Training.

No further announcements were brought forward.

#### **IV. Adjournment**

B. Rice thanked the members in attendance for their time and requested a motion to adjourn. Motion made by J. Feuerman. Second by J. Lang. Unanimous vote in favor of adjournment. The Workforce Development Board meeting was **adjourned at 9:03 a.m. The next board meeting is scheduled for November 9, 2021 at 8:00 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Helen Dennis