

**WASHINGTON COUNTY
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING
WebEx Meeting
April 15, 2020**

Members Present

Christine Dressel	Robin Anthony	Christopher Eng
Susie Evans	Jordan Fry	Tara Gearing
Jeff Klemmer	Cynthia Larson	Monica Ramirez
Lori Tapani		Tom Yuska

Action Team Members

Tom Colosimo	Stan Karwoski
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CareerForce Staff Present

Ryan Carufel	Deb Cunningham	Tina Dudzinski
Robin Hakari	Rachel O'Connell	Karen Ritter
	Rick Roy	

1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair – Christine Dressel

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Christine Dressel. It was determined there was a Quorum of business members in attendance. A Motion was made to approve the Agenda, it was seconded and the Motion was approved.

2. COVID Updates

Rick Roy said staff is working with the public through phone, emails and online material and most people are working from home. Commissioner Karwoski added the County Board evaluates the situation weekly and follows Governor Walz's executive orders. Rick continued saying we will come out of this gradually because ending these restrictions suddenly would likely cause a spike in illness again.

Chris Dressel asked if businesses are notifying you they are furloughing people.

Robin Anthony, Stillwater Area Chamber of Commerce, answered an employer furloughed 65% of their workforce. There is a COVID-19 "Updates and Resources" section on their website. They are conducting virtual meetings helping people with applications which are confusing for small businesses. A Business Recovery Committee has been started which meets every Thursday at 9:00 a.m. to discuss what they can do within the Stillwater School District area.

Chris Eng, Washington County Community Development Agency: He has heard heartbreaking stories from small businesses because 80-90% of their revenue stopped. This has hit businesses from all sectors, such as auto repair, restaurants, real estate, and farmers. There is frustration over the Small Business Association loans because the regulations and process are taking a long time. A loan program was approved by DEED for \$30 million and they have had over 500 applicants.

<https://mn.gov/deed/business/financing-business/deed-programs/peacetime/> Businesses should get their application in so they are in the queue. The Federal Reserve has the \$3.2 trillion Main Street Program:

<https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/pressreleases/monetary20200409a.htm>

Rick Roy said some larger businesses are still hiring. People are seeking help in updating their resumes and getting into the unemployment system. Chris Dressel said banks are allowing businesses to delay payments on loans and waiving interest.

Stan Karwoski, County Board, said Chris Eng gave the County Board an update on the Open to Business program regarding how the county is helping business. It is under consideration by legislators about local aid and anticipate an extension of the property tax deadline to May 15th with no penalty.

Monica Ramirez, Century College, said classes have gone online and while enrollment is down for summer, some courses are up. They are adding more online classes and short certificates that can be completed in one semester. As soon as stay-at-home orders are relaxed, some technical classes will resume. Math and computer labs are still open with a small number of students in a large room. The Deans have been rotating their presence in the office and most are working remotely. They are planning for fall and it is not yet known what classes will be online or in the classroom.

3. Program Updates

Veterans Service Office – Ryan Carufel: There is a Veteran’s office in every county in Minnesota which advocates for veterans and helps them apply for federal, state and local benefits. Washington County staff have been working from home. There are almost 15,000 veterans in Washington County.

Patrick Kelly, the VA hospital director, is using the VA hospital in Minneapolis as a center for COVID-19. Long term care patients have been moved to St. Cloud. Minnesota allocated \$6.2 million to the Minnesota State Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans affected by COVID-19 to get up to \$1,000 for specific expenses. Over 900 applications have already been submitted.

Youth Programing and Plan Approval – Karen Ritter: Two policies need approval by the WDB to submit with the plan. The Individual Training Account policy is a structure to get funding to the training providers that are on the Eligible Training Providers List. Minnesota submitted a waiver to the Department of Labor to include in-school youth in that structure. The amount per youth per program year was updated to \$4,400 which includes training, supplies, and related support services. At enrollment, an employment plan will be developed and signed. County purchasing cards can be used in addition to billing authorizations. A Motion was made to approve the Youth Program Policy, it was seconded, and the Motion was approved.

The Incentive Policy provides funding through support services for recognition of achievement for youth engaged in job search or training. Youth are awarded up to \$100 for successful steps towards their goals. Some examples include \$25 for GED attainment, \$25 for getting a diploma

or transcript, and \$50 for getting a job working 30 hours or more and providing pay stubs as documentation. This information is needed for monitoring and the awards provide an incentive to provide documentation. Gift cards from Target, gas and food cards are used. A Motion was made to approve the Incentive Policy, it was seconded, and the Motion was approved.

Adult Programming – Karen Ritter: There are a variety of waivers being sought at the state and federal level. Many participants on the WIOA Adult Program and NOW grant are involved with CDL training and Interstate Driving School is continuing training; however, the DMV's are not testing. WIOA Youth enrolled in area colleges and high schools are doing distance learning.

Participants on the Senior Community Service Employment Program for 55 and over are on Emergency Paid Sick Leave furloughed with pay for the average weekly hours they worked prior to the emergency. The senior Legacy Program participants are still getting help with job search and training.

Dislocated Worker Programming has not had a rush of people yet. Most referrals to the program came from the unemployment group sessions which are no longer being held. Career Lab staff are still referring people. People who have been laid off or furloughed seem to be waiting it out to see what will happen with their business. Unemployment applications are primarily done online and there is a long wait time to get through on the phone. Unemployment is hiring 75 new people, but they will need to be trained before starting to work.

Chris Dressel asked how long does it take to hear back from Unemployment?

Robin Hakari, Career Services Specialist, replied some people received benefits in a few days. But the process takes longer for people with other issues such as problems with their password. There are long waits on phone lines and at one point some lines were shut down so staff could be assigned to process unemployment claims. The \$600 weekly payment from the federal government has been added to people's unemployment benefits and there is a 13 week extension for people who have exhausted their benefits.

MFIP/SNAP and SNAP E&T – Tina Dudzinski: Tina supervises Employment Services for Washington County's public assistance programs: the Diversionary Work Program (DWP), Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T). With public facing services ending, they are trying to provide the same service and response for people trying to meet their basic needs. The Governor's executive order March 20th gave temporary authority for DHS to make changes to programming to continue to provide services. Face-to-face interviews have been waived, applications can be taken by phone, verbal signatures are accepted on forms and applications, and verbal verification "to the best of their knowledge" accepted for 3rd party providers. With these changes, some benefits have been approved the same day and has resulted in a quick increase in caseloads.

The DWP program is four months long providing intensive job search assistance with the intent of diverting people from the MFIP program. With high levels of unemployment, all families are deemed unlikely to benefit from this program and being rolled over to the longer term MFIP

program. Families are being granted good cause for the inability to fully participate in the program and no adverse actions, such as sanctions, are being implemented. MFIP has a lifetime limit of five years and anyone approaching that limit has been given an automatic six month extension. With these changes, they are unlikely to see many people exiting these programs. SNAP for able bodied adults without dependents is time limited to three months in a 36 month time period. That time limit has been waived.

The Pathways to Prosperity for basic manufacturing skills and certified production training was supposed to start April 13 and now is scheduled to start mid-July to allow time for Adult Basic Education and Century College to shift to distance learning. DEED has granted an extension on the program to the end of December. *Stan Karwoski* added if there are any tools such as a new office environment or approach to deliver services, let him know and he will bring it to the County Board.

4. Documents and Plan Updates for June Meeting – Rick Roy

Memorandum of Understanding: This is an agreement between the partners of CareerForce outlining the services we provide, how we provide them, and how we refer people to service. It was reviewed during the monitoring visit and we need to be more explicit; those changes will be reviewed by the state and sent out to our partners.

Infrastructure Funding Agreement: This document outlines how the physical costs of the CareerForce locations are covered, primarily Woodbury where all services have to be available. It is a complicated document and there have been a lot of waivers so we have made a number of changes.

One Stop Operator: WIOA law added a requirement there should be a competitive process to name an independent organization to oversee the operations of CareerForce locations. This is difficult to implement across the state because it is not highly populated and the state has applied for a waiver for that requirement. We have always had a consortium of Wagner Peyser, Adult Basic Education and Vocational Rehabilitation and are hoping to continue that.

Regional and Local Plan: The Regional Plan includes the greater metro area. DEED simplified the application and approved the work plan to be more of a narrative describing how we work together and coordinate services. Rick is working on the Local Plan with support from staff. All of these documents will be on the agenda for June to be reviewed and approved by the WDB as part of their oversight responsibilities.

5. Q&A With Board Members

Susie Evans said the monitor had tough questions but was impressed with the Board's connections with business. Chris Dressel complimented Rick for the structure put in place. Stan Karwoski commented the County Board values the business community's efforts during this challenging time and the Board will be as supportive as they can.

Meeting Adjourned – Chris Dressel

A Motion was made to adjourn the meeting, it was seconded, and the Motion was approved.