



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
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**Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 9th, 2021, at 12:00 PM
VIA Zoom Virtual Conference Video Call at:**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/97958183678?pwd=WFdnN2sxSTEyMCtjcXBINmdIcE5Idz09>

Meeting ID: 979 5818 3678

Passcode: 559128

In attendance: B. Dupont; G. LaCapra; J. Ryan; J. Vrabely; J. Wrinn; P. Smithwick; C. Rafael; S. Romano; W. Pizzuto; W. Starbuck; G. Pisani; W. Levy; M. Rooke; S. Mancini; R. Richard, K. Lucey; M. Voghel; W. Rybczyk

Also in attendance: B. Amin; C. Martin; D. Collins; S. Domanico; H. Pelletier; J. Reho; L. Lawrence; P. LaRosa; S. Barbieri; R. Venturino; T. Sanders; O. Blake; S. Smith; S. Boyce; K. Maness; S. Green; S. Magras; Cunningham; S. King; L. Hughes; W. Biggs

Staff in attendance: M. Hayden; J. Amis; S. Mertz; A. Goncalves

Meeting commenced at 12:00pm

1. Approval of Minutes from June 10th, 2021 Meeting

A motion to approve was made by P. Smithwick and seconded by J. Vrabely. Motion approved.

2. NRWIB Committee Reports and Updates:

a. Committees

- **Personnel - JoAnn Ryan**
Nothing was reported.
- **Youth - Fernando C. Spagnolo**
Nothing was reported.
- **Finance - William Pizzuto**
Nothing was reported.
- **One Stop - Joseph Wrinn**
Nothing was reported.



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

- **Disability - Joseph Vrabley**

J. Vrabley advised the Board that the disability committee convened on August 10th, 2021. The first topic discussed was the Ticket to Work program, in which the participants are on long term social security disability and looking to get back into the workforce. The program currently has thirty-one participants. The second topic discussed at the meeting regarded the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS). The NRWIB has a three-year contract with ADS for a summer program and it got off to a great start. The program currently has twenty-seven students and is looking to add a six to eight week summer youth program. The next topic discussed was indicating disabilities during participant registration, which required a lot of staff training and got off to a really good start. The committee has also been contemplating bringing on a full-time or a part-time sign interpreter. They also anticipate a federal compliance monitoring for the disability's compliance in April 2022, and the committee will definitely be ready for that compliance audit. The next Disability Committee meeting will be held early November, with quarterly meetings to follow.

- b. **DOL – Stephen Romano**

S. Romano updated the Board that the Federal Cares Act ended the previous Saturday, and approximately twenty-three thousand individuals stopped receiving unemployment benefits. Fifty-eight thousand individuals have moved on with extended benefits, which is a federal extended benefits program that pre-existed the Federal Cares Act. The walk-in traffic at the American Job Center has been averaging between forty to fifty people per day, with about half of that population coming into the center for unemployment insurance, and the other half coming in for employment services. The DOL is looking into ways to increase that number down the road.

- c. **One Stop Director Update**

K. Maness informed the Board that due to the WIOA funding cuts, the AJC staff was reduced by twelve people, effective June 30th, 2021. Currently the affiliate Danbury office has one career navigator for WIOA and one for JFES. The affiliate Torrington office has one career navigator for WIOA, and a staff member that works half their time in the Waterbury office, and the other half of their time in the Torrington office. The Waterbury office has two career navigators, as well as the staff member that is working in both the Waterbury and Torrington locations. Due to the increase of people that are coming into the information sessions because they are virtual, K. Maness and her supervisor have taken on a caseload to try to keep up with the volume of people coming through. The JFES career navigators have been trained to do WIOA applications for any of their customers that are going to be co-enrolled. Starting monthly in September, a Danbury staff member will go to the New Milford Town Hall to give out information, help people register with CTHires, and update them on the services that are provided at the Danbury American Job Center. K. Maness included her ITA report in the meeting agenda attachments for the whole fiscal year of last year that ended on June 30th, 2021.

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**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**
FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

There were a total of one hundred and forty-six ITAs over the different grants available, for a total of \$1,067,844.00 spent on ITAs.

d. Deputy Director Update

M. Hayden informed the Board about the Next Gen Manufacturing Partnership hiring event on September 15th, 2021, from 11am to 3pm in three locations: Waterbury, Danbury, and Torrington. There are approximately ten manufacturing companies that will be at each location, ready, willing, and able to hire. There are approximately forty job-seeking participants that have pre-registered for the event, walk-ins will be allowed on the day of, and the NRWIB is excited about that. There was a lot of work done to pull together the event, some of the attendees on the call took part in that planning, and M. Hayden expressed his appreciation for everyone's hard work. The Board will be updated more on the turnout of the event after-the-fact. The event will be the first of its kind for the Next Gen Partnership out of the five workforce boards, and the NRWIB is excited to be on the frontlines of that. Like anything, however, the event planning process was a learning curve and the staff at the NRWIB is looking forward to the outcome.

M. Hayden also advised the Board that the NRWIB has put in place a new vaccination policy for all employees, stating that all staff must be vaccinated by September 30th, 2021. If any staff member chooses not to be vaccinated, they will be subjected to bi-weekly Covid tests. The senior NRWIB staff, along with the senior CRI staff and some of the other workforce boards in the state worked together to carefully craft the new policy. The senior staff really felt that it was a necessary policy to put in place to best protect the NRWIB's staff, all employees were notified about the policy, and the organization is well under way to a one-hundred percent vaccination status.

As for training and recruiting for CARES II, the NRWIB is still actively doing that in the sectors of CDL, healthcare, environmental remediation, and retail. The CARES II funds are available through December 30th. The NRWIB is still running its digital ads through Comcast, has billboards throughout the region, and buses wrapped in Waterbury and Danbury to promote the free job training that is part of the CARES II funding. The NRWIB is diligently working to get the word out about the services it provides, including through the use of social media, as twenty-three thousand individuals just stopped receiving the pandemic assistance benefits, and the organization is really hoping to see that influx of job seekers come in to the American Job Center. There have been approximately twenty-five to thirty participants attending informational sessions in the past few weeks, which is a greater amount than in the recent months, and the NRWIB is very excited about that.

M. Hayden also asked the Board to spread awareness regarding the extra CARES II funds that are available for training and reiterated that the NRWIB is here for anyone looking to get a job. M. Hayden also expressed his appreciation to the staff's help and willingness, especially the career navigators in all three locations, Danbury, Waterbury, and Torrington, as he understands that the organization is understaffed, and he believes everyone has really stepped up.



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

Lastly, M. Hayden took the time to recognize Sonia Boyce, the Executive Director of the Virgin Islands of The United States Workforce Development Board, as well as her staff that were present at the meeting. Sonia and her team are starting up a state workforce board in the Virgin Islands, and the DOL approached Cathy Awwad to work with Sonia and her staff to give them some insight as to how the NRWIB operates and runs business as a workforce board. There are some differences, however, and M. Hayden explained that the workforce board in the Virgin Islands will be a state workforce board, and the NRWIB is a local workforce investment board for five areas. M. Hayden said it's been really nice to speak to Sonia and her staff and encouraged everyone on the meeting to offer their insight as well, should Sonia need any help to get things going in the Virgin Islands.

S. Boyce thanked M. Hayden for the invite to the meeting and expressed that it is a great learning opportunity for her and her team. They are looking forward to new partnerships. S. Boyce also thanked the staff at the Virgin Islands of The United States Workforce Development Board who took the time out of their busy schedules to join the meeting, and thanked the NRWIB's Board of Directors for welcoming her and her team as well. M. Hayden wished S. Boyce and her staff the best of luck and S. Boyce thanked him and expressed that he had been very gracious and very helpful.

e. Update from New Opportunities, Inc. President & Chief Executive Officer William Rybczyk

W. Rybczyk advised the Board that in their backup documentation was a one-page overview of CT Food 4 Thought Inc., a project that New Opportunities, Inc. is extremely excited about. CT Food 4 Thought will launch in Torrington, over the course of the next month, and construction will be finishing up on three green houses, as well as a processing plant warehouse at 360 Technology Park Drive, Torrington, CT. This project will focus on hydroponic growing, and was a vision of W. Rybczyk's predecessor, Dr. James Gatling for well over twenty years. The project went through a number of different iterations, and finally has arrived at a hydroponic growing lettuce, kale, and arugula, at least for its first days with the three green houses that were built. This will be an excellent opportunity for employment training, it will consist of locally grown produce of the highest quality, and will also be able to generate positive revenue for the work of New Opportunities, Inc., in terms of their work in housing assistance, fuel assistance, meal delivery for seniors - all the work they do on a regular basis. There will be a dedication ceremony for the building, and the building will be named after the former Department of Labor Commissioner and New Opportunities Inc. Board Chairperson, Patricia H. Mayfield. It will be dedicated in her honor. W. Rybczyk expressed his excitement about that and advised the Board that he will send out a flyer to M. Hayden with the details. The event will take place on Tuesday, October 5th at 11:00am. New Opportunities Inc. will be unveiling the sign and having a walk through of the facility. W. Rybczyk believes that the great thing about this project is that there is great opportunity for expansion. New Opportunities, Inc. is already looking at the next phase of operation, as they can add no less than twenty additional greenhouses on their site. Therefore, the organization is really

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NORTHWEST REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

looking at this project as a learning laboratory as well, in terms of hydroponic growing. Initially they will be growing the lettuce, arugula, and kale, but there will be opportunities for rosemary, basil, and other types of growing products. New Opportunities, Inc. is looking at partnerships for training, partnerships with the community college and the local school system in Torrington, and even a partnership with the regional school Wamogo. W. Rybczyk reiterated that this is something he's really excited about, it's something the organization has been working on for a number of years, and finally they have everything moving in the right direction in terms of their greenhouse growth. W. Rybczyk thanked M. Hayden and C. Awaad for allowing him the opportunity to speak about the project, and urged anyone on the call who would like to discuss the project further to reach out to him.

W. Rybczyk also informed the Board that New Opportunities Inc. is having a retirement celebration for Dr. James Gatling on October 26th at the Aria, and the information had already been sent out. Dr. Gatling served New Opportunities Inc. for forty-two years as a CEO, and prior to that was a Board Chair. The company was not able to hold a proper "send-off" at the end of March, 2021, so now that the community is able to gather in person, they were finally able to plan something. Dr. Gatling served the NRWIB Board of Directors for a number of years and partnered with the workforce board and its board members. The planning committee, chaired by Mayor O'Leary, worked diligently to pull the event together. W. Rybczyk believes that it will be a great time at the Aria to honor Dr. Gatling's legacy and achievement.

3. Review and Approval of Revision to ITA Policy

M. Hayden advised the Board that currently the NRWIB's ITA policy is that the organization pays one hundred percent of the cost for the customers' training up front. After some careful review and discussions with some of the other workforce boards, the NRWIB has decided to change the policy and instead pay benchmark payments. The organization hopes that the new policy will produce better outcomes for the organization and help save some money if the customer does not complete their training or earn that credential. This will also put some ownership on the providers to work closer with the participants and to make sure they fulfill and complete the program, and actually earn that credential. This policy has worked really well with other workforce boards, and given the recent budget cut, the NRWIB has looked to different ways in which they could save money, especially if a participant is not fulfilling their training requirement. After further discussions with C. Awwad, K. Maness, the Director and VP of Operations, as well as Supervisor Denise Babcock, it was decided that the new policy should be given a try. M. Hayden hopes to report back to the Board in the December, 2021 or March, 2022 meetings to give them an update on how effective the policy was for the NRWIB.

A motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by J. Ryan. Motion approved.

4. Approval of Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Corrections (Non-Financial)

M. Hayden informed the Board that this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been in the works for some time, and the COVID pandemic somewhat interfered with that. This is a non-



**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

financial agreement, and the NRWIB will be working with the program Project Re-entry at Manson Youth Correctional Institute and at Cheshire Correctional Facility. Through the program, the NRWIB will be able to provide career counseling and employment assessments, along with training for inmates planning to return to the region. The NRWIB is very excited about this opportunity. The organization has had discussions with the warden and the staff at both facilities and they are also very excited about the program. The NRWIB is looking to best be able to serve those inmates who will be re-entering the communities and give them a 'leg up' on attaining employment upon their release.

A motion to approve was made by B. Dupont and seconded by J. Wrinn. Motion approved.

5. Approval of Increase in JFES Contract of \$211,915.00

M. Hayden apologized to the Board for not providing them with the backup documentation showing this contract modification, however, the NRWIB is still waiting for that communication from the Department of Labor, and once it's received M. Hayden will send the documentation to all Board members. The NRWIB was excited to hear about the the added incentives of dollars, and is looking to utilize the areas of subsidized employment, soft skills, and work readiness skills, along with the Uber for Business, which has worked tremendously well in situations where transportation is a barrier for job seekers. Transportation is a huge problem for the workforce boards' participants in Waterbury, Danbury, and Torrington, mostly in the Northwest corner. M. Hayden advised the Board that the NRWIB is also looking to use these funds to acquire driver's licenses for participants, as many of them don't have one, due to the lack of funds for the training and/or the road test. Another way the NRWIB would like to use these funds is to provide any uniforms required for the participant's job, as well as vaccination costs, physicals, etc. M. Hayden believes it's always nice to have these added dollars for support services, because the jobseekers very much need them. The NRWIB is still awaiting clarification about daycare support services, as the cost of daycare is still one of the biggest barriers that customers face, especially for single mothers who don't have anyone to watch their children. The NRWIB is very appreciative for these additional funds from the State Department of Labor.

A motion to approve contingent up the receipt of the contract documentation was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by C. Rafael. Motion approved.

6. Approval of Resolution for Temporary Signatory

M. Hayden advised the Board that the NRWIB's Executive Director, Cathy Awwad, is out on medical leave at least through the end of September, and the Resolution for Temporary Signatory empowers M. Hayden to sign contracts on C. Awwad's behalf through October 15th, 2021. With the current policies in place, M. Hayden already has the capability to sign most contracts, but the NRWIB wanted to reassure that this would be a non-issue, especially with the Federal Compliance Monitoring possibly taking place in March, 2022. This will enable M. Hayden to sign all necessary documents and contracts through October 15th, 2021.

A motion to approve was made by J. Wrinn and seconded by W. Pizzuto. Motion approved.

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**NORTHWEST REGIONAL
WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD**

FIRST JOB | NEXT JOB | BEST JOB

7. Financial Report

NRWIB CFO S. Mertz advised the Board that the Budget vs. Actual documentation was provided with their agendas, and this is where the NRWIB ended up for June 30th, 2021. The financial report is consistent with last year's numbers. Also included with the agenda was an updated All-Funds Budget, and S. Mertz informed that Board that the NRWIB will have a more finalized version of the All-Funds Budget at the Board meeting in December, 2021, as the organization is waiting for the JFES funding, and some possible additional funding from CARES. S. Mertz reassured the Board that she is available if any of the members have any questions for her, they may contact her by email, and she is in the Waterbury office as well. A motion to approve was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by G. LaCapra. Motion approved.

8. Other Business

M. Voghel made the Board aware that her organization's offices are still in flux, and they hope to have all the renovations complete and be open to the public as of October 1st, however, it is still a work in progress.

M. Hayden thanked the Board of Directors for taking the time to join the call, given everyone's busy schedule. He expressed his appreciation for everyone's participation, and to the NRWIB staff on the call for their hard work and for stepping up the last few months. There is still a lot of work to be done, but everyone has really "stepped up to the plate," and met the challenge. M. Hayden once again reminded the Board about the Next Gen Manufacturing Hiring Event on September 15th, and encouraged the Board members to spread the word, and even stop by on the day of, as it should be a great event and the NRWIB is really trying to help manufacturing companies in the Northwest region. The flyer was shared in the meeting chat, and M. Hayden advised anyone who would like another copy to reach out to him directly. M. Hayden also thanked the individuals from the Virgin Islands once again for joining the meeting.

G. Pisani thanked everyone at the meeting, including the staff, for a wonderful job done, and for taking the time out of their schedules to be there. G. Pisani wished everyone a happy and healthy autumn season. No motion necessary.

9. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by W. Pizzuto and seconded by G. LaCapra at 12:29pm. Motion approved.

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