East Tennessee Local Workforce Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday 14 December 2021

Bridgewater Place

Knoxville, Tennessee

Present

Sam Alexander

Martha Axford

Pete Barile

Jessica Belitz

Paul Boyles

Jimmy Brooks

Sean Hensley

Gary Human

Mark Palmer

Michael Raiford

Angie Respess

Rob Rule

Julie Simpson

Tanika Walthall

Absent

Joe Daughtery

Chris Griffey

Brad Hale

Cindy Holt

Anthony Mountain

Jerry Sexton

Brian Shoffner

Jerry Slaven

J.J. Walker

The meeting began at 6:05, with Ms. Axford telling the Board members that the meeting was being held at Bridgewater Place to allow for social distancing. The minutes for March 2021 and July 2021 Board meetings were asked to be approved. Sam Alexander made the motion to accept the minutes as written and Sean Hensley seconded it. Motion passed. Ms. Axford asked for our new Board members to introduce themselves. Julie Simpson from UT Medical Center Human Resources represents Knox County. Rob Rule represents Monroe County and is the President of the Vol- Federal Bank. Janice Cole also introduced herself as the newest member of the Staff to Board team.

Kathi Hollander presented the budget update. She explained that the state would not pay any expenses for November or December 2021 until January 2022 due to updating the system. At this time 125 thousand dollars a month is projected for the adult program. Director Walker explained if the adult money runs short dislocated worker money can be transferred into the adult program.

Ms. Axford did not call for a vote or approval of the budget so that members could take time to read, take notes, and ask questions before a vote. A vote will be taken digitally by the end of this week.

Susan Cowden and Jennifer Eppley gave the contractor report. Ms. Cowden reported that 72 dislocated workers were doing Covid relief work in government buildings with a National Dislocated Worker Grant. Thirty six percent of the total grant has been spent. There is a cap of twenty thousand dollars per worker. She also introduced Lindsay Witter, who is currently training Career Specialists at the American Job Centers, and who will train new AJC staff as they are hired. Ms. Eppley talked about job fairs that the American Job Centers are hosting. There have been 518, held on employer sites, at the AJC’s, and with the mobile coach. The state has allowed a budget for advertising AJC events, there has been ads on WATE and WBIR. The advertising slogan is “Ready for a Paycheck?” There have also been some specialized job fairs for people with hidden disabilities and justice involved clients.

Ms. Angie Respess, with Vocational Rehabilitation has also been allowed to begin working with inmates before being released from Morgan County for services after release. Director Walker talked about the Behind the Bars welding program currently at Morgan County. He also showed the distinctions between the American Job Center partners. Title I is Adult, Dislocated Workers and Youth, they are responsible for training. Title II is Adult Education, who are responsible for education and HiSet achievement.

Title III is the State staff who are responsible for Wagner Peyser, SNAP, and jobs for Veterans, Trade Adjustment programs, RESA, and Migrant Worker programs. Title IV is Vocational Rehabilitation.

Victor Oakley discussed the monitoring report. Participant files are monitored regularly, and findings addressed with the Service Provider. He also presented two changes to the Eligible Training Provider List. He explained whenever an approved training provider makes more than a twenty five percent change in fees the Board must approve those changes. The first change was for the Elite Technical Training Center, the cost increased from $971.25 to $1399.00. Ms. Axford called for acceptance of the changes, Sean Hensley made the motion to accept and Gary Human seconded it. The motion passed. The second change was for TCAT Knoxville, Class A CDL training. The cost decreased from $3295.00 to $2303.00. Ms. Axford called for acceptance of the changes, Pete Barile made the motion and Jessica Belitz seconded it. The motion passed.

Tonya Randolph reported on the Apprenticeship, and Incumbent Worker Training grant totals from the 2020-2021 program year. In total 40 contracts were written training 742 people at the cost of $553,884.60. Seventeen contracts were written in at-risk or distressed counties. This year Business services is on track for six registered apprenticeship contracts and several Incumbent Worker training grants. Rapid Response activities included 12 companies served through Cisco WebEx and 858 workers attended meetings.

Gary Human talked about Ford Motor Company moving to East Tennessee with 34,391 committed jobs and 13 billion dollars in capital investments.

Director Walker reported on the Federal Report Card for Tennessee. Grand East as well as East met all of the benchmarks with 90% or better scores. Six of the ten indicators merited “Best Practices” status. East had six best practices, one target met, and one target that needed attention. He announced changes to committees and formed a new Youth committee. He is working on the regional and local plans for March. He urged the Board to take home the end of the year narrative to read. Thomas P. Miller and Associates have been hired for the WIOA contractor procurement. The RFP will be ready to go out in early January and the final list will be presented in March for full Board vote. The RFP is for both the Adult/Dislocated Worker, Youth and One Stop Operator. Tennessee has published new labor market information as well as demand occupations through 2026.

The East Tennessee area is slated to become a “work first” region, which means that job seeking services will be offered before training opportunities. After listening to our sixteen county business owners, they want, and need, workers now. They can’t wait twelve to eighteen months. For a client to be considered for training they will have to show evidence of exhaustive work searches. Clients asking for training will have to have letters of commitment from employers in the field(s) which they are seek training. All of the Career Specialists will attend training early next year to be prepared for a “work first” community. Director Walker said, that the end result is that the client goes to work.

Mike Raiford asked if the “work first” program really works and if there was proof that it works. Victor Oakley answered Mr. Raiford’s question. He said that both Kentucky and Florida are “work first” states and that both states are seeing good results with what they are doing. Ms. Angie Respess added that “work first” is a priority category. Mr. Pete Barile said that he was desperate for upholsters and he could not find people who wanted to work with their hands. The discussion ended with recruit people instead of farming them and that nets have to be cast wide to capture employees. Ms. Axford also noted that the jobs4tn program is not user friendly and needs to be changed.

Ms. Axford called for meeting adjournment. Mr. Sam Alexander made the motion and it was seconded by Mr. Gary Human. Meeting adjourned.