



**Benchmarks of Success for Maryland's Workforce System**  
Policy Committee  
May 20, 2021 1:30 – 3:00 PM  
Virtual Meeting

**Attendees:** Tina Turner, Brit Ayers, Charles Hunt, Grace Kelly, John Kashuba, Ken Lemberg, Lloyd Day, Lura Bozarth, Matt Bernardy, Patti Morfe, Shamekka Kuykendall, Wesley Wilson, Gary Bonner, Matthew Wallace, Regan Brewer, Suja Joseph, Gwen Edwards, and and Natalie Clements

**Handouts:** Agenda and Takeaways and Recommendations form on Intake and Assessments

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**Minutes**

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**I. Welcome and Meeting Overview**

- Lauren is now officially on family leave!
- The committee welcomes the panel speakers:
  - Gary Bonner is the Executive Director of PCs for People, a nonprofit whose mission is to provide the opportunity for all low-income individuals and nonprofits to benefit from the life changing impact of computers and mobile internet.
  - Regan Beyer is the President of the Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC). JARC provides high quality manufacturing skills training and support services to help lower-income and unemployed workers achieve self-sufficiency. JARC provides economic and workforce development to businesses to improve their competitiveness. JARC is an EARN grantee.
  - Suja Joseph is the Reemployment Program Manager at MD Labor DWDAL. She oversees the Division's reemployment programs, including the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and Reemployment Opportunity Workshop (ROW).
  - Matthew Wallace is a current program participant in Per Scholas' EARN training program: Partnership for Tech Talent.

**II. Debrief from April Discussion: Intake and Assessments**

- The committee wants to take full advantage of the meeting time to hear from the panels. Last meeting, they had a robust discussion and did not have time to get through the whole agenda.
- Tina and Natalie put together a summary document of learnings and recommendations from last month's panel on "Intake and Assessments". Natalie emailed this out with the

agenda. Please look over this document and email Natalie by close of business, Thursday, June 3rd with any additions, recommendations, or comments.

- The report this year does not have to look exactly like the recommendation reports in the past. It can include both learnings and recommendations, so the summary is in a very draft form while we figure out what the format should look like.

### **III. Panel Discussion: Access and Participation**

- The pandemic created an increased demand for digital literacy training and for infrastructure, such as laptops and wifi. Training providers might not have seen a difference in the average type of customer but likely have seen a decrease in the number served because of equipment needs and getting the word out without in-person information sessions. Conducting assessments virtually can be difficult without getting the face to face feedback that is important to building rapport.
- Organizations had to procure/figure out quickly how to move to a 100 percent virtual platform. Many trainings can occur online (e.g. soft skills training) and can be recorded to re-take any time. Some hands-on activities must be done in-person (e.g. disabling/rebuilding a computer; hands on manufacturing). Organizations can do some training virtually and focus on which aspects must be in person to allow for a hybrid environment. A virtual platform is not the same as a learning management system (LMS). A LMS takes into consideration the different learning styles.
- Positive factors of participating in virtual training include: not having to factor in travel time or meal prep. Participants can focus more on learning and have more time for work-life balance. Participants can get feedback from other colleagues, monitor self-care, and take breaks while virtual. However, engagement tends to waiver due to isolation and monotonicity. It is relatively easy for participants to stay engaged virtually if they already have a relationship with technology and the necessary equipment. Those who do not know how to navigate a virtual platform struggle more with setting up their personal space, learning how to conduct research online, and general digital literacy.
- One challenge has been the lack of networking and face-to-face events. Solutions include increasing social media presence, spreading word of mouth, using partners for referrals, using census tract data for direct mailing, and information-sharing with community leaders. It can be more challenging to build a sense of community within a cohort because of the lack of in-person events.
- Setting up an individual with access to wifi and equipment is labor intensive. Instructors have to walk customers through one by one on how to access. Tutoring over the phone is challenging. The virtual platform requires more one on one type of work. Having to work with customers in precarious living arrangements is a challenge. It is essential to communicate what type of equipment is needed before the start of a program and to have multiple avenues of communication between the cohort and between customers and instructors.
- COVID-19 has accentuated the difficulties that customers were already facing. Organizations need to be mindful in a state of emergency that some requirements need to be relaxed to accommodate individuals in need, such as attendance and punctuality. The ability to record Zoom sessions was helpful. Organizations need to anticipate the needs of the customers better to be more proactive instead of reactive. This may include sending

letters, calling, and texting to keep participants engaged and to meet customers where they are. Organizations should be proactive in their support of customers and meet participants where they are.

- Adaptability to COVID-19 has raised the bar on employer expectations for employees concerning their ability to work remotely. Jobseekers without digital literacy or equipment are at more of a disadvantage now.
- For organizations abating the digital gap, it is important for partners to support them by donating retired technology and invest in digital literacy. Customer-serving organizations require collaboration and information-sharing. One recommendation is to promote the collaborative partner model used for the One Baltimore for Jobs (1B4J) program.
- The workforce system needs to provide support that is equitable for all, including using different methods to reach out to customers and provide information. Rural areas need upgraded connection speeds.
- Organizations must take the time to invest in the ability to know if what they are doing virtually will yield the results they want. Funders should understand that programs need the latitude to apply different methodologies to do things differently. Technology must foster relationships among the learners.

#### **IV. News and Notes**

- Here is a summary of the report-outs at last month's WIOA Alignment Group meeting:
  - The Communications Committee issued April's newsletter focusing on correctional education, returning citizens, an overview of the WIOA Title II program, accessibility tips, and access to the COVID vaccination.
  - They plan to issue another newsletter next week on the career pathways grants, COVID-19 support for adult education, and highlighting Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month.
  - The Data and Dashboard Committee leaders wrote a narrative to apply for the U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Data Quality Initiative to enhance workforce data from DWDAL and from MHEC's community colleges in the Maryland Longitudinal Data System. If granted, this will enable the system to de-duplicate Benchmarks data and create a dashboard. Dylan McDonough, a Policy Analyst on my team, is the new coordinator for this committee.
  - The Professional Development and Technical Assistance Committee released their second training module on the Benchmarks of Success in the Hub. The third module is approved and ready for distribution, and the fourth module is currently in reviews. Email me or John Feaster if you are having trouble accessing these modules.
- There is no WIOA Alignment Group meeting this month due to Memorial Day.

#### **V. Next Steps and Action Items**

- Committee members please look over the takeaways and recommendations document from panel on Intake and Assessments and send any comments, edits, questions to Natalie by close of business Thursday, June 3rd.

- Natalie will write a similar summary of takeaways and recommendations based off of this panel today.
- The next meeting is on Thursday, June 17th on the topic “Staff and Business Engagement”. For this panel, the committee will brainstorm together and lean on the Governor’s Workforce Development Board to identify speakers. Members should email Natalie if they have a suggestion. The panel should include staff at different levels (e.g. frontline and supervisor).