

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: May 8, 2024

Time: 3pm – 4pm

Committee Attendees

Kara Demirjian (co-chair), Jess Wright (co-chair), Cleve Dixon, Kraig Kistingner, Kim Kuchenbrod, Todd Lowery, Biswa Puhyal, David Sabathne, Jennifer Serino

Guest Attendees

Teresa Cherry, Jennifer Foil, Antonio Garcia, Marty Johnson

Staff Attendees

David Gallagher, Christy Montgomery-Jones

1/2/3. Welcome/Approval of Meeting Minutes/Co-Chair Comments

Co-Chair Jess Wright requested a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes from January 10, 2024. Kraig Kistingner motioned for approval, David Sabathne seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Jess began her comments by thanking Andrew Warrington for his committee leadership. She quickly reviewed the agenda, noting that preparations for the April WIOA Summit had focused many of the committee's efforts during the previous months – and would be reviewed during this meeting – but that now it would behoove the committee to review and decide on upcoming priorities as part of this meeting as well.

Co-Chair Kara Demirjian was welcomed and invited to add her comments, which she did.

4. Statewide Summit Business Engagement Sessions Debrief

Each of the lead presenters of the business engagement sessions at the WIOA Statewide Summit were invited to give a quick debrief on their session experiences and results. Marty Johnson led off with a debrief on the "Using Data to Engage with Business" session. She described the three business scenarios or use cases that formed the basis of the session. The main questions received were regarding how, and how quickly, could the described data be obtained by business engagement staff. Several channels were discussed to access the data. Additionally, Dee Reinhardt, who spoke about the IEBS system, asked the group for thoughts on

some of the new resources DCEO is looking to roll out under IEBS, and she got some useful feedback.

Next, Biswa Puhyal of IDHS discussed the session on engaging business to consider more inclusive hiring practices. This session featured both employers and workforce professionals on a panel – focused on Will County -- that discussed innovative methods to bring employers together with an inclusive workforce, such as training and workshops for employers and job fairs and hiring events focused on inclusive communities. Kraig, another of the panel members in this session, spoke about what works for him as an employer in terms of finding, hiring and retaining an inclusive workforce.

Kim Kuchenbrod then discussed her session, which was on the dos and don'ts of business engagement, and on creating an elevator pitch for employers. Participants were broken into groups, given examples, and given a timeframe to create their elevator pitch to keep it short, simple and to the point.

Antonio Garcia followed with a discussion of the session on talking to businesses. Key to this is to engage with businesses without using government jargon, but to use business terminology and present WIOA services as a value proposition for business. He discussed the value proposition that Lake County WIOA presents to its businesses: workforce solutions, workforce training, and a workforce ecosystem. By having a clear message you encompass everything that the employer needs. Lastly, Antonio discussed the need to take this message directly to company leadership, to have buy in at the highest levels. One way to do this is to utilize the relationships and connections of local workforce board members.

5./6. Review and Discussion of Committee Priorities/ Revisit of Business Engagement Data Collection Options

David Gallagher began this agenda item by recapping a graphic that summarizes what we had determined at the end of last year to be the committee focuses for 2024:





With a new co-chair coming on board now, it seems like it's a good inflection point for us to go back and take a look at these focuses, make sure that's still what we want to do and talk about next steps for this committee and what sort of line of attack we want to take on these and what priority we want to give to each of these.

He said that we can also talk about that in terms of how we want to commit our IWIB members on the committee to take our message to the IWIB retreat next month in Chicago as the IWIB begins a strategic planning process to determine what as a whole they want to work on and what sort of structures they want to put in place to meet those priorities.

So again, just briefly, those four focuses are **messaging**, sort of what is it that we want to say to employers? What value does the workforce development system bring to them? And how can we best sort of package that message? And then **marketing** is, okay, if we've got a message, how do we get that out to employers? What are the effective means of providing that message to employers in ways that they can listen or will listen to? Third is **partnerships**, specifically sector partnerships, sort of undergirding that process, TPM process and other types of partnerships. What can we do as a committee to help support that process as it continues to grow? And then finally, **data**, most specifically what sorts of data are out there around business engagement, the levels and so forth of business engagement and how can we gather that data and utilize it ourselves to better understand how we're doing with each of these focuses and areas of concern.

Kara suggested that we start with the end in mind. What's the goal at the end of the day? What does success look like? If we were as a committee successful, what would that success entail? What are we measuring ourselves on? How do we know if as a committee we've actually been successful at what we're doing? So that we can ensure that we're accountable to these priorities.

Kim noted that a couple of data collection mechanisms are in place through Apprenticeship Illinois and the Talent Pipeline Management project to collect business engagement information across the workforce development ecosystem. She also mentioned a study from CREC, the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness, and they have a process logic model to look at how are we moving the needle in regards with business engagement. But, she questioned, how are we defining "business engagement?"

Jess agreed with this as an important issue. There needs to be a solid definition. What is business engagement? And we find ourselves in this hamster wheel that we've been in for a year, because we don't have the overarching definition of business engagement? She said it is incumbent on us as a committee, the business engagement committee to, to send a recommendation of what the definition of business engagement is up to the, the full IWIB with a suggestion on how then to track it. Without that, we will continue to spin our wheels in the



mud. People on this committee will get frustrated and we will lose business engagement in the business engagement committee.

Kara asked if the BEC had seen the Apprenticeship Illinois marketing plan. Kraig responded that we had not, but continued to Kara's point, what is the question and what are we looking to achieve? We are looking to achieve greater business engagement and understanding of the workforce system across the state of Illinois. So that's the bottom line, how we define that data point is what we need to do. And it's through messaging, marketing, and partnership that we achieve those data points.

Kara then discussed, in some detail, the marketing plan developed for the Apprenticeship Illinois program. This includes an introduction, the goals and overviews of the committee. Then we did the four-step process: mapping where we currently have apprenticeship programs and layered that on with our specialists; deployed a survey through partner organizations like IMA, IMEX, SHRM, et cetera; created a segmented database of who we're trying to focus on for apprenticeship programs needs vary by industry, so our messages and content need to be different; and then we go into branding and messaging. And again, this is specific to apprenticeship, but there's a crossover here; and then we went into an implementation strategy of how do we develop and build our business partnerships, our ambassadors, leverage their channels. So if it's an IMA, an Illinois Manufacturers Association or a IMEC, how do we leverage them to help better communicate and market our integration for apprenticeship programs and build that outreach plan for them? She then suggested that it would be great to do something like that for this committee, have a plan that we're actually submitting to the IWIB for an approval process.

Kraig pushed back a little, saying that we first need agreement around how are we going to define business engagement? Once we do that, we can start doing all that pre-work to build a marketing plan, but internally we have to say what is, just as in any organization, what's measurable? Is it subjective? Is it repeatable? Is it valid? I think those are the keys when we come up with that definition and having people like a Todd Lowery or a Biswa Puhyal or a Teresa Cherry saying, well, this is what we have access to as LWIBs. We can't measure what you're asking for, right? We need to understand what is that common thing. And maybe you invite a Carolyn Portlock who is president of the IWP to weigh in on that conversation as well, right? Because while we're talking about it at the state level, it's the same problem at the local level. I guarantee every local workforce board will tell you that. But I think you have to start there.

Todd agreed with the importance of a definition of business engagement, but he also noted that there are existing uses of the term and they vary across programs. In addition, there are levels of business engagement that may come into play. Reacting to a specific employer's

specific need is one level. Reaching out to one employer is another level. Communicating with a group of employers is a third level, etc. This needs to be accounted for as well.

Jess responded that her only struggle with the BEC defining business engagement is that the BEC is not who the system is reporting to. Our job is to support and drive business engagement, but it's not necessarily our place to set the expectation on what it is, because we're not the ones that any of the sites are reporting into.

Kraig stated that it should be our job to make recommendations to the IWIB, and that by engaging with stakeholders to define business engagement we can drive action towards resolving this dilemma.

To that end, Jess suggested that we devote the next meeting to this question, with a small group follow-up to take that discussion and develop a working definition within a couple of weeks of the December BEC meeting. Christy Montgomery-Jones suggested that we also need to be cognizant of the federal guidance on this subject (such as it is) and what our state WIOA plan commits us to, and Todd agreed with this caveat.

David Sabathne cautioned that we need to take on something that we can follow through on and actually accomplish something. Teresa Cherry noted that the costs of implementing a system wide tracking system are imposing, but achieving economies of scale by implementing a system statewide might be preferable to each local area going it alone. Teresa also agreed with Kraig that the responsibility of this committee is to make recommendations to the board. However, the BEC and the IWIB have responsibility, but no ability to keep all of the partners accountable. Even so, particularly from business services, she stated that she would love this group to help develop those partnerships that we need with each other to provide data that is relevant and meaningful.

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Public Comments

There was no public comment.

9. Adjournment

A move to adjourn was unanimously approved.