East Tennessee Local Workforce Board Meeting

Tuesday 10 December 2024

ETHRA Boardroom

Knoxville, Tennessee

Present

Sam Alexander

Jessica Belitz

Darian Edwards

Rebecca Harmon

Sean Hensley (virtual)

Gary Human (virtual)

Mark Palmer

Thomas Payne

Angie Respess (virtual)

Tim Richmer

Tracy Sharp

Julie Simpson

Michael Smith

Rob Rule (virtual)

Jennifer Thacker (virtual)

Absent

Aileen Beeler

O. Wayne Fullington

David Graham

Cindy Holt

Chris Honeycutt

Chris O’Keefe

Jennifer Pace

Mike Raiford

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Director E.L. Morton. He introduced two new Board members, Darian Edwards and Michael Shane Smith. He also introduced Christina Peters, from Caring Work Places and Ann Clark, from the Roane County American Job Center. The Roll was called.

Chairwoman Simpson asked for the minutes from the September 17, 2024 Board meeting to be approved. Motion to accept was made by Sam Alexander and seconded by Jessica Belitz. The motion passed.

Christina Peters spoke to the Board about recovery friendly work places. She said that 70,000 Tennesseans suffer from addiction. Tennessee is the second highest state in addiction deaths in the US. Eighty-three percent of employers feel ill prepared to deal with substance misuse. She went on to say that 93% of incarcerated people between the ages of 25 to 44 were employed or seeking employment.

Her organization has 87 employers, and has served 400 individuals with a 71% retention rate.

Ann Clark, from the American Job Center in Roane County, shared the success story of a young woman, Nichole, who, with help from the American Job Center and WIOA funding has successfully finished cosmetology school and embarked on a career in the hair care service industry. She was grateful to be given a second chance to be successful.

Director Morton discussed the sector strategies in healthcare, energy, and tourism. A coordination letter will be sent discussing spending the 12 million dollars in our 16-county area. The Boards thoughts and guidance are welcomed as we move through the sector strategies.

The National Dislocated Worker Grant in Cocke County designed to help the flood clean-up will be used to fund 25 workers for up to 29 hours for 10 weeks for wages up to $25.00 per hour. If we receive another round of funds it will be used in the same manner. The grant is being offered to employers on a reimbursement model.

The Anderson County American Job Center has relocated to Clinton from Oak Ridge saving money on rent. The new AJC is on Leinart Street across from the Court House. Cleveland State has offered a space in their center in Vonore Tennessee to operate an affiliate AJC site. The Ribbon cutting will be held on December 19, 2024.

Victor Oakley and Kathi Hollander discussed the financials. Kathi discussed that the 10% administration fee was for operating the administration office of 7 people and that 90% of the funding was used for the American Job Centers to help clients. It was discussed that adult services receive the bulk amount of funding and the spending is watched very closely to avoid shortfalls. Dislocated worker funding can also be shifted to use for adults. Kathi also said that the PAR monitors will begin their review on January 6, 2025. The ETHRA audit has been completed and there were no findings in the Workforce Development Division.

Victor Oakley discussed the scorecard for the East Area and pointed out that there were some red areas.

The red areas are areas of concern for potential recapturing of funds. The recapture will auto correct in the second year of funding. In the category of youth work experience which appears red will be green on the December report card. He also said that the minimum participant cost rate at all levels is a concern. The concerns are about the rise in the cost of living and other interferences.

In the new bill for Workforce Development 50% of all funding has to go to direct participant training costs. Serious discussions of the number of brick and mortar American Job Centers will have to be looked at and decisions made to ensure that we have 50% of our funding going to services. Since 2018 funding has decreased and participant percentages have increased. By moving the Anderson County AJC, we have decreased the amount of rent by $1,700.00 per month.

The Board was asked if there were any questions. Michael Smith asked with the MPR going to 50% what was it previously? Victor answered it was at 40%. Mark Palmer asked when the state takes away money do they tell us where the money cut is going. The answer was no, they do not tell us where the money is going. Victor stated that in the last 90 days 32 positions have been eliminated in Workforce Development on the state level.

In the Federal Performance metrics, we did not meet all of them. In the Measurable Skills Gain we fell short, but it was a data entry error, and Victor said that it will be rectified in the next quarter. In the Youth median earnings, it will resolve its self if we remain placing youth’s in high wage jobs. East was not the only area that did not meet all of the standards.

Jennifer Eppley did the One-Stop-Operator update. Shae said that changes were coming in WIOA and that the AJC’s were engaging as much as possible. She announced that there are more access points added, one at the Union and one at the TCAT Knoxville. The American Job Centers are doing more with less. Foot traffic in the AJC’s is increasing. The Knoxville AJC is doing expungement clinics and there were 40 participants at the last one. In Cocke County wrap-around services are being provided to the flood victims. The mobile coach is going to job fairs and serving clients.

Angie Respess, Vocational Rehabilitation, announced a counselor vacancy in Knoxville. She also said that the School Transition Programs are going well. Project Search is doing well in both schools and adult services.

Chairwoman Simpson asked that the executive committee complete the survey by Friday the 13th of December. She called for meeting adjournment. The motion for adjournment was made by Sam Alexander, seconded by Tim Richmer. Motion passed. Meeting dismissed at 7:50 p.m.