



**METRO NORTH REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD  
QUARTERLY REB MEETING NOTES  
Wednesday, September 16, 2015**

Present: James Donovan, Joanna Dowling, Yvette Drinkwater, Susan Jepson, Madeline Hoffman, Debra Jacobsen, Karen Sampson Johnson, Robert Jones, Danny LeBlanc, Kambiz Mina Reddy, Paul Richard, Larisa Schelkin, Steven Sullivan, Valerie Sutton, Mark Tardiff, Tricia Tyler, Juan Vega, Susan Walsh, Kerry Wollner

Absent: Charlene Bauer, Reed Brockman, John Drinkwater, John Kendzior, Rose Lydon, Cheryl Scott, Sandra Smith, Mary Tighe, Lisa Amaya Price

REB Staff: Linda Bass, Robin Dion, Peter Farkas, Jonathan Hasak, Michael Hatfield, Meelynn Wong, Kimberly Napier, Holly Vogel

Guests: Linda Rohrer, Career Source; Dan Theobald, Vecna

**Welcome and Introductions: Linda Bass**

Linda welcomed members to the REB's new space, which was designed by Symmes, Maini, and McKee Associates (SMMA), a Cambridge architectural, engineering, and interior design company. Coincidentally, REB member Kerry Wollner works for SMMA.

Linda apologized for inadvertently scheduling the meeting during Rosh Hashanah.

Paul then introduced the following new REB members:

Yvette Drinkwater is the Manager of Talent Acquisition at Lahey Hospital & Medical Center. She was recommended by former REB member Joan Robbio. Yvette has expressed interest in participating in the Youth Council.

Debra Jacobson, recommended by former REB member and now Revere Mayor Dan Rizzo, has been the Administrative Director of MGH Revere since 1998. She was involved in the implementation of One-Stop Career Centers back in 1995, as the Director of Employment and Career Services at Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries. Prior to that she worked as coordinator of vocational programs for persons with disabilities, and she has expressed interest in our new Committee on Service to Persons with Disabilities.

Valerie Sutton is the Director of the Career Services Office at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and prior to that, worked at Fox School of Business at Temple University, and the

Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. She is interested in becoming involved in the Career Center Committee.

Paul then welcomed new REB Associate Director, Jonathan Hasak, who has a Masters in Education Policy and Management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as well as five years of experience working in urban schools.

Paul then welcomed guest Dan Theobald, Chief Technology Officer of Vecna, a technology company providing robotics and healthcare IT solutions. Dan was a speaker at the REB's April STEM Event and is interested in learning more about the REB and its work.

**Review of June 2015 Meeting Notes: Paul Richard**

Paul requested a motion to approve the notes of the June 2015 REB meeting. The motion was moved and seconded, and the notes of the June 2015 REB meeting were approved as presented.

**Adult Basic Education Transitions to College and Careers Committee Report: Mina Reddy**

The ABETCC Committee convened over the summer and reviewed progress on its six-month goal, and set new goals through December. They also discussed Career Ready 101, as well as how to align transition programs curricula with curricula at community colleges to facilitate student transfer. The committee also reviewed lists of adult education to college transition programs.

**Joint Committee: Susan Jepson**

Over the past few months, the Joint Committee has been working to review and approve the Annual Plan. The committee also discussed implications of the transition from WIA to WIOA; this conversation will continue at the next meeting in early October. New members are welcome.

**Youth Council: Jonathan Hasak**

Jonathan highlighted two current priorities:

- Opportunity Youth Ambassadorship Program (OYEP), a work-based learning initiatives where 20 disengaged youth from five high schools will be selected and hired to help place 125 of their peers into paid internships or jobs. The REB is currently applying for funding (from SkillWorks) to implement this program.
- Obtain more private industry representation on the Youth Council.

**Update on REB Activities: Linda Bass**

The state was recently awarded the American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant. As a result, the Northeast Advanced Manufacturing Consortium (NAMC) will be funded to support 72 apprenticeships in manufacturing over the next few years. The state award was \$2.9M, and the share for NAMC was \$684k, which will be distributed across four Workforce Development Board regions.

Housekeeping Items:

- The REB is required to have members sign an Open Meeting Law form, and keep all signed forms on file. Linda provided the forms for members to sign, or to take home to submit at a later time.
- Members are required to complete the online Conflict of Interest training every two years. It takes about 30 minutes. We will let all members know when they are next due to take retake the training; however most members are due to take the training either for the first time, or once again.
- Committee/Industry Partnership sign-up: If you are not already participating on a committee or partnership, please let Linda know on which committee or you would like to participate. She would be happy to discuss potential committee membership with anyone who would like more information.
- Regarding the REB meeting schedule, it was agreed that quarterly REB meetings will continue to be held on Wednesdays, from 8:00am – 9:30am, with the exception of every September meeting, which will be held on Tuesdays from 8:00am – 9:30am.

In the fall of 2016, the REB will be required to undertake Workforce Development Board certification, which includes development of a new strategic plan. The REB's current strategic plan goes through June of 2016, so this year we will be developing a strategic plan for FY17 – FY20. As a part of the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, we are required to participate in regional planning, which will include other Workforce Development Boards (the specific regions are yet to be determined). We will also start working on procurement for a career center operator, and as part of that process, we will discuss what we would like our career centers to potentially do differently.

We also will need to negotiate memoranda of understanding with our partner organizations, including Adult Basic Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Department of Transitional Assistance, as well as others. For those core partners, we'll need to negotiate infrastructure costs for the career centers.

### **Review of Strategic Planning Benchmarking Chart: Linda Bass**

The Strategic Plan Benchmarking Chart has been updated through 6/30/2015. We are now in the final year of the strategic planning period, and in addition to noting our progress, we can also now more easily see where we were too ambitious and where our thinking changed, but without revising our goals. We are currently around 75% in terms of goal accomplishment. Linda then asked for questions or comments on the chart; there were none.

One note is that staff are close to completing drafts of the Career Pathways charts. We hope to circulate them more widely in the near future before formally disseminating them to schools, youth programs, and career centers. We should be sending them out to you in the next month or so.

### **REB Member Highlight of Madeline Hoffman: Paul Richard**

Madeline has been a REB member since 2003, and has been active on the Career Center Committee and the Metro North Healthcare Partnership.

Paul: Can you tell us a little about your company and your role?

Madeline: I work for Hallmark Health System, a healthcare system north of Boston. Our two flagship hospitals are the Melrose-Wakefield Hospital and the Lawrence Memorial Hospital of Medford. We also have other healthcare facilities throughout the northern tier of the Metro North area.

Paul: What are the primary company needs in terms of workforce?

Madeline: I think we have a split between entry-level positions that require more interest and engagement in getting into the healthcare field, and not necessarily a lot of technical skills, because we do a lot of on-the-job training. On the other end, we have the highly super-skilled positions such as physician assistant, nurse practitioners, critical care nurses, etc., that do require a high level of skill and experience.

Paul: Why did you choose to join the REB, and what has your experience been?

Madeline: My title is Director of Employment and Labor Relations – and originally I was director of HR of a single hospital. When we started to become a healthcare system, I realized I needed to get more in tune with what’s happening in the workforce development area for the communities we serve. I was introduced to the REB system through one of the grants that came out many years ago. I have found that it has been helpful in keeping me aware. I live in New Hampshire, so it’s been very helpful to enrich my employment with my involvement in the REB.

Paul: What would you like to see the REB do more of?

Madeline: I would like to see us connect more with more employers like ourselves. I know healthcare is one of the largest employers in this state, and I would like to see more healthcare groups get involved....not just hospitals but all types of healthcare systems.

Paul: Tell us something that we’d be surprised to know about you?

Madeline: Other than my work, my real passion is working with rescue animals. I volunteer at Salem Animal Rescue League in NH.

Paul: Thank you very much, Madeline!

### **Congratulations and Farewell to Juan Vega: Linda Bass**

Juan Vega has been a member of the REB since 2005. We have worked with Juan on the Board, through Centro Latino, where he served as Executive Director about 17 years, and also as a partner in the CONNECT project. Juan is now the Assistant Secretary for Communities and Programs at the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, under Secretary Jay Ash. Linda presented Juan with a plaque in appreciation for his many contributions to the board. Juan then said a few words, mentioning that he has enjoyed participating on the board

for the past ten years. He said that in his new position he has the opportunity to work with the Workforce Skills Cabinet, and will be involved in one of the new administration's new projects, called Community Contacts. Through this project he will work with municipalities to encourage them to implement best practices in municipal management. His office will also be rolling out the Economic Development Agenda. He said that he would have liked to stay on the REB, and mentioned that if there are ways that he can support the REB in his new role, he would be happy to do so.

### **Discussion on Creating a Demand-Driven Workforce System: Facilitated by Paul Richard**

This is a continuation of a discussion that the REB started at the June meeting about how to rethink our approach to the Metro North workforce development system to make it more "demand-driven," in response to the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This discussion will be a basis for the fiscal 2017 to 2020 Strategic Plan.

Paul emphasized that this is a real opportunity for the REB at this time, and for all members to leverage their expertise to improve the system. He emphasized that new challenges require new strategies. We are working with a new generation of employees and employers. This is an opportunity to try to identify where we can make the system work better. (Note: This discussion addressed question numbers 1,2,4 and 5 from the agenda).

### **QUESTION #1: What does it mean to be "demand-driven"? What does this mean from the business perspective? From the job seeker perspective?**

Challenges:

- Our needs today are different than the needs that many people were educated/trained to meet. There are differences in technology and services, and the needs are constantly changing. Not only are there changes in career pathways, but also the skill sets that go with them.
- As an engineer by training, when you say "demand-driven" – the demand is driven by data. Let's make sure that in everything we do, our decisions are driven by data. There is tons of data - and it needs to be provided and acted upon in a timely basis. We need a view of the short-term deliverables, and to use strategic thinking to identify the long-term deliverables.
- It is important to engage employers to help individuals to start on a path that helps to best serve employer needs (through, for example, an apprenticeship program, company tours, internships, OJT model, etc.). For example: How do you take a newly trained RN, and put them on the path to become a critical care nurse? We need to think harder and smarter about how to take the existing workforce to become ready to meet different demands a few years down the road.
- As an employer, it's important look at retraining existing employees to learn new skills to meet changing needs. The need and demand won't always match, and the demand

can change quickly. Employers need to think outside the box. What skills are transferrable?

- Jobs, skills, and aptitude are three separate axes that interplay with each other. It seems that whatever we do to prepare workforce for certain jobs, there's always the time problem – by the time folks are trained, the jobs have changed. Aptitude – the ability to learn skills quickly – can be the key to success.
- Jobs change so quickly today – it is possible, for example, that an entire segment of workers can be out of work almost overnight. We will need to be able to handle those kinds of disruptive events and technology changes.
- Employability rests more on the side of aptitude – ability to develop basic customer services skills, research skills, etc. It's difficult to train people to have good customer service skills, for instance (it's not just about reading a script). Attitude, in particular, is difficult to teach (hard vs. soft skills).
- It's important to ask where will someone be the most comfortable and natural (e.g., at a computer, or doing customer service). We have to help people figure out what's the best type of work for them.
- These same issues have been raised for decades -- the main difference is that today, the pace of change is very fast.
- Professionals in a wide range of fields would be valuable participants in this discussion, and they would be eager to share their thoughts with you if they are asked.

**QUESTION #2: Putting Federal and State policies, rules and regulations aside for a moment, if we could design a workforce system from scratch, what would it look like? How would it differ from our current system?**

- Career centers need to get a clear understanding from employers about what exactly they need, and how the centers can meet those needs, in the short/long term.
- Although you need data, disruption is happening so quickly – and those communication lines aren't moving fast enough. We may end up going to other countries because we can't fill the jobs. In addition to the tools for personality assessment, it's important to have a dialog to help prepare for disruption.
- There are probably many tools available to assess aptitude to learn.
- Career Source has developed a model with financial institutions with the CONNECT project. Many individuals begin at the entry level, but then there are many opportunities for advancement.

- It is critical for industry to educate staff to adapt to changing needs. Many companies want individuals who already have the “soft skills,” and will train for specific needs beyond that. Career counselors need to be educated on soft skills necessary to succeed and employee accountability.
- Career Counselors need to be educated on the evolving job descriptions, both in manufacturing and other industries.
- Attitude is the #1 correlate of success – a good attitude is likely to ensure that someone will be successful in the job. Good attitude can overcome a multiplicity of challenges.
- Work with employers to consider training options (versus layoffs).
- The labor participation rate across the country is low, so it can be difficult for discouraged people to have a positive attitude. It would be useful to encourage these people by saying they don’t need everything, but to start with good communication skills and attitude.
- Future leaders in many different sectors need to be fluent in data; those skills are needed if you are in charge of managing the workforce system.
- It’s not just a matter of screening for attitude--employers need to share responsibility for that attitude by creating jobs that are meaningful and satisfying, and creating a respectful environment.
- Integrated programming (incorporating math into other education programs) can be an effective strategy.

**QUESTION #4: The REB incorporated strategies that emphasized developing industry partnerships and career pathways in its FY’13–16 Strategic Plan. In thinking about our region’s key competitive advantages and industries, in what ways should we consider enhancing these strategies for responding to these industries?**

- It might be worthwhile for employers to look across industries to see other company needs. It will help identify commonalities and challenges.
- Workers that have been in one job for many years, and have to go back to get retrained, get nervous because for the first time they don’t understand something or are challenged. But it’s important for the employer/trainer to put a positive spin on it – and frame it in terms of enhancing existing skillsets.
- One of the issues is a common attitude about lifelong learning. Our education system is often designed to get an education, and then a job. But it’s important to integrate into training the idea that continuous learning will always keep you ahead of the curve.

- Offer training of “soft skills” at the career centers, in addition to industry-specific job fairs. The job fairs are underutilized by employers because employers are concerned with the customers’ lack of soft skills. Some manufacturing companies won’t go to the career centers anymore – the workforce system needs to overcome “government” stigma with employers.
- Employer partnerships with local colleges, to address soft or other skills to continually train employees, can be helpful.
- Try to reach out to those who are disengaged. Have employers go to the career centers and explain to the staff what their needs are and provide recommendations for best preparing candidates to work at their companies.
- Around the state different regions are talking about potentially changing the mix and emphasis on job seekers vs. businesses within the career centers. In some regions they plan to allocate a larger portion of funds to employer services than in the past – funding business service representatives to meet with employers to try to meet their needs. Currently career centers post job listings, but haven’t done much matching of people to those jobs because of the volume. They do also bring in companies to do information sessions at the centers.
- Math is often a challenge to employment. People who are just coming out of school and go directly into the work force often don’t have the necessary math skills to succeed.
- Many employers are now encouraging their employees (even providing some with financial incentives) to do community service around STEM. The career centers could ask volunteers come in to the center to provide math training to job seekers.
- Perhaps employers can engage with career centers more to communicate their future needs – since they are best able to forecast the needs most relevant to their own industries.
- In the future, the bulk of the jobs are going to be human-to-human jobs, as robotics will replace a large number of technology positions.

**QUESTION #5: Youth in our region will become college or career ready, or they will be disconnected from the labor market. What strategies should we consider implementing in order to enhance services to youth in our region?**

- Many people have a degree but lack soft skills; internships and similar opportunities are critical to helping to address this disconnect.
- Computer science education needs to be offered in all schools. It’s surprising that being in a region that’s considered the “tech leader of the world,” kids cannot get a proper



computer education. Internationally we are not competing – (India and China, for instance, are far ahead of the US in this regard). They are teaching this at the voc-tech level, but not in the traditional curriculum.

- The curricula of voc-tech and traditional schools should be more similar to each other.
- There needs to be an increased investment in infrastructure. Especially in urban areas, the “digital divide” is still very real. We do not have basic computers in the hands of children who are going to be our future leaders. Many people have been disenfranchised and do not have access to computers or computer education.
- Can the workforce system influence the education system?
- K-12 math skills are far behind current workforce needs. There should not be a need for remedial math and English courses in high school.
- Sixty-eight percent of community college students need remedial math before getting into an Associates program. This uses up Pell money and resources.
- Metro North is strategically located – both within Massachusetts, the country, and globally. Employers from other countries are interested in learning more about what MA is doing with regard to STEM and preparing the future workforce. We need to leverage our strategic position in this regard.

### **Next Steps**

Members then decided that it would make the most sense to create a Strategic Planning Task Force to continue to build upon this conversation. Linda will send an email to identify who may be interested in participating.

Paul thanked members for their participation in this constructive discussion.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

**The next REB meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 9, 2015, 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM, at the Metro North REB, 186 Alewife Brook Parkway, Suite 216, Fresh Pond Mall, Cambridge.**