

Western Maryland Consortium Board Agenda

Date: April 11, 2025
Time: 11:00 AM

Meeting Format: Virtual

I. Approve Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Amos brought forth the motion to begin with introductions.

II. Introductions

Amos began introductions, as follows:

Mya Shoop – Administrative Assistant at the Western Maryland Consortium (WMC)

Stacey Ferrare – Executive Director at WMC

Brandon Butler - People Strategies, One Stop Operator

Melanie Chapman – Director of Career and Professional Education in Allegany County (AC).

Mike Genevro – Parker Plastics, Board Member

Christopher – President of Garrett County (GC) Community Action Council

Julie McCoy – President and CEO of Allegany Chamber of Commerce

Shari Plump – Director of Western Maryland Rehabilitation Services and President of Deaf/Hard of Hearing Services

Amos McCoy – Washington County (WC) Chair of the board.

III. Introduction of the New WMC Executive Director

Amos stepped in as interim director to facilitate and maintain operations across the Western Maryland Consortium's three counties (Washington, Garrett, and Allegany). Chris Abell left soon after joining WMC, leaving an open position that Stacey Ferrare filled. Amos praised the people at WMC for being able to continue daily operations through uncertainty and negativity.

Amos opened to questions. There were none.

Stacey introduced herself by sharing her background as a mother, business owner, and former Summer Youth Assistant at WMC. Her professional journey has included roles as a career counselor and, more recently, as a Special Grants Program Manager, where she was able to further develop skills in community networking and grant management.

She emphasized that WMC serves individuals across all demographics and barriers, which has equipped her with the ability to effectively coordinate and integrate community resources and services for meaningful impact. Stacey acknowledged the organizational challenges associated with leadership transitions and underscored the importance of achieving both internal and external goals. These include efforts to stabilize the organization, support staff and morale, improve human resources functions, and enhance job role clarity.

Stacey expressed her commitment to strengthening existing partnerships and re-engaging with past initiatives to assess opportunities for renewal and progress. She also noted her intention to pursue less restrictive funding sources—such as Title I WIOA funds—that would broaden WMC’s service capacity and community outreach.

Additionally, she highlighted that barriers to service tend to intensify further westward and invited collaborative dialogue on strategies to address these challenges constructively and promote forward momentum.

Following her remarks, Amos opened the floor for questions, particularly in relation to Stacey’s new role. No questions were raised.

IV. Resolution and Board Vote

Amos presented a resolution to formally recognize Stacey Ferrare as the Executive Director of WMC and to approve the Board Meeting Minutes from October 2024.

Shari moved to approve the minutes, and the motion was seconded by Mike. No discussion or corrections were noted. The motion passed unanimously with no objections. The Board Meeting Minutes from October were approved as written.

Amos then requested a motion to approve the appointment of Stacey Ferrare as Executive Director of WMC. Melanie moved to approve the appointment, and Chris seconded the motion. All members were in favor, with no objections.

Stacey Ferrare was officially appointed as Executive Director of WMC.

V. Christmas Tree Report

Key performance indicators include employment rates in the second and fourth quarters, as well as overall retention rates. An explanation was provided regarding the “Christmas Tree Report,” including a brief overview of its column definitions and the data it represents. WMC is currently exceeding performance expectations in all measured areas.

Following this overview, Stacey opened the floor for questions. Melanie requested to view data specific to education and employment outcomes.

Amos invited additional questions. Juli inquired whether the performance data could be broken down by county, specifically requesting information on AC’s performance separate from the rest. Amos confirmed that this breakdown is available on a separate tab and can be shared. Each county’s individual performance data is included.

No further questions were raised.

VI. Local Regional Plan and Legislative Updates

Brandon began. Every four years, each local workforce board in MD and nationally is required to complete local and regional plan. A few months back, the governor's workforce development board set up parameters for local and regional plans. It is like an inverse triangle, where the state has to complete its state plan every four years and then regional and local plans must fit into it. Brandon has met with several partners to draft a plan, which was submitted to governors' workforce development board's review. It has since come back for final revisions and approvals, any updates regarding changes and feedback will be sent to core partners, then back to the state for final revisions / approval. He gave thanks to the others on the call who provided feedback, especially Shari.

It was noted that certain local areas are grouped together for regional planning purposes—for example, Lower and Upper Shore are combined into the Eastern Shore region. Similarly, the Capital Region, which includes Frederick, Prince George's, and Montgomery Counties, comprises five distinct local areas within its boundaries. Therefore, Brandon and his team are looking into sending one comprehensive plan for the region which, as noted above, are analogous in content and structure at the local levels. They have also requested an extension, which is not uncommon.

Brandon asked for questions, comments, concerns. There were none.

Brandon described this legislative session as one of the most challenging in memory, due in large part to the state's budget deficit and the resulting political tensions. It was emphasized that, unlike at the federal level, the State of Maryland is constitutionally required to pass a balanced budget by the conclusion of its 90-day legislative session. While a balanced budget was in place as of April 7th, that balance was no longer assured after April 8th.

According to the Conference Committee Report, the General Fund balance stands at \$317 billion, with the Rainy Day Fund at \$2.1 billion. However, given Maryland's substantial reliance on federal funding, particularly in areas such as labor and workforce development, the outlook for the coming months remains uncertain. This is especially true in the context of expiring pandemic-era funds, specifically those from the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Of the \$77 million in federal relief funds allocated to local workforce boards, WMC's portion has already been reduced following the departure of former Executive Director Deb.

The potential reinstatement of federal workforce funds remains uncertain and is currently a subject of debate at the federal level. Despite these fiscal and legislative challenges, there were notable successes:

- Legislation was passed allowing the braiding of state dollars into workforce development initiatives.
- RAISE Act: This act secured significant funding to support apprenticeship programs, including funding for apprenticeship intermediaries—organizations that facilitate partnerships and share knowledge related to apprenticeships.

- The Maryland Workforce Association successfully advocated for the preservation of funding for middle and high school career coaching programs. Efforts to remove funding from this initiative—which would have resulted in the loss of over 200 workforce professionals—were successfully opposed.

Brandon began addressing House Bill 772 and how it brought significant attention to these issues pertaining to Blueprint's retention. As a result of this advocacy, additional funding was secured that will go directly to local workforce development boards. This funding is guaranteed through Fiscal Year 2028.

Brandon showed a physical copy of the “a stronger workforce for America” act, a WIOA Re-authorization act with its own unique strengths and weaknesses. Because other funding streams are being authorized too late, there's a better chance for a new bill than a re-authorization. However, there are some negatives as well; particularly a requirement that 50% of the funding provided to a workforce development board has to be spent on training. Additionally, it allows an additional 10% to the governor's workforce board in the form of “set aside money” and can be allowed up to 25%. The current is 15%.

Brandon likened this to a “... a doctor that every one of two patients has to be given penicillin...” (some people are allergic, don't need it, etc.)

The result is whether you need it or not, you'll have to go to training. Brandon is in talks with feds and federal representatives on why that isn't a good idea.

With the results of the election, the committees in control of these bills have different priorities than before.

Amos asked for any questions. There were none.

VII. Summer Youth Program Update

Stacey led. Some of our program managers had to step up where they had not in the past to meet with local partners like DORS, LMB, DORS, DHS, etc. We are currently waiting on funding and awards to be able to move forward. As of now, there are 250 interested candidates. This is one of the things we are best known for and is therefore a priority, for participants and local businesses. Intakes and eligibility determination will be taking place over the next few weeks to get the ball rolling.

VIII. Discussion on a Board Retreat

Amos led. This will require further discussion due to the small group. It would be great for Brandon to help put together another retreat for the summer because he feels it will be helpful for development and to discuss further the changes that are going to happen.

IX. Appointment of New Washington County Chair and Board Chair

Amos is stepping down from his position as chair for various reasons, leaving an open position. He will continue to participate as a non-voting member for a year to provide guidance based on

experience, if the board is interested/allows. More information will be disseminated through email and the process will officially begin then. There were no further questions. He was given thanks for all his contributions over the years. Stacey, as a non-voting member, voted for him to stay.

X. Updates from Board Members

Melanie shared that a new assessment policy has been implemented for basic education and English language assessments. Notably, WorkKeys assessments have been added to the list of approved tools. This addition is intended to create better alignment between adult education assessments and the skills employers are seeking, thereby supporting individuals in successfully pursuing employment and career pathway opportunities. It is open for comments until 4/16. The cosmetology program, that Brandon/WMC was a key part of as well, is getting ready to celebrate their first graduation ceremony in May and the second cohort is already full.

Shari thanked Amos and said she'd like him to stay on to have the consistency. She then said she looks forward to the summer retreat for brainstorming and learning about changes/updates. She said she has no further information on the grants Stacey is waiting on and says she appreciates the staff at WMC. DORS is still here, waiting for federal money to drop, which is why the grants have not been dropped.

Amos concluded the meeting by referencing his personal notes regarding WMC from 2016. He read the following statements:

- "Why does everyone speak in acronyms that no one understands?"
- "Agents are working for their own purposes, not the collective mission of workforce development."
- "What do I get out of being in this meeting? Do I need to be here?"

Amos emphasized that as WMC grows and new businesses enter the region, it is essential to be intentional about outreach. Inviting stakeholders in and clearly communicating who WMC is, what services are offered, and how the organization supports the business community can significantly enhance local business retention and engagement.

Following these remarks, Mike shared his perspective, stating that workforce development directly impacts his daily life. He stressed the importance of funding educational initiatives, particularly for youth and women, noting that without proper investment and preparation, the return of jobs under a new administration could present challenges if a strong talent pipeline is not in place.

Mike expressed a desire to become more involved following his retirement, particularly in assisting companies in understanding and accessing available funding and grant opportunities. He indicated interest in having further discussions with both Brandon and Amos on this matter.