



Benchmarks of Success for Maryland's Workforce System
Policy Committee
June 17, 2021 1:30 – 3:00 PM
Virtual Meeting

Attendees: Tina Turner, Brit Ayers, Matt Bernardy, Venus William, Charles Hunt, Grace Kelly, Ken Lemberg, Lloyd Day, Roseanne Fish, Patti Morfe, Charnetia Young, Lura Bozarth, and Natalie Clements

Handouts: Agenda and Takeaways and Recommendations form on Access and Participation

Minutes

I. Welcome and Meeting Overview

- The committee welcomes speakers for the panel on Staff and Business Engagement:
 - Venus Williams, Resource Division Manager/Contract Monitor at the Anne Arundel Department of Social Services
 - Roseanne Fish, Regional Business Solutions Consultant at MD Labor DWDAL
 - Charnetia Young, Senior Advisor Business Development at CVS Health Workforce Initiatives

II. Panel Discussion: Staff and Business Engagement

- Temperature checks, personal protective equipment (PPE), check-in procedures, social distancing, and plexiglass barriers became the norm for staff that went in-person over the last year, with safety being the number one priority. Those who shifted to work at home halted their normal services and transitioned completely, acquiring necessary equipment, creating a workable space in their home, and altering all services to be virtually accessible. The mental health of both in-person and remote workers remained at the forefront, with different tool kits and resources constantly being shared to support staff.
- Additional compensation was used to motivate frontline staff. Individuals had their wages offset and were provided bonuses. Other staff received holistic health and wellness services that worked to address issues that arose due to COVID-19 such as housing and food insecurity. Organizations adopted a human-centered approach to ensure that staff felt fully supported, and some ways this was done include: (1) CVS created a COVID-19 hotline for colleagues; (2) Staff shared workloads when needed; and, (3) Staff scheduled regular check-ins with one another.
- Overall, staff embraced the transition to a virtual environment. Their flexibility was key. Meeting the needs of each individual and their particular circumstance was crucial. The

biggest challenge with the shift was moving people at such a large scale. Organizations have realized that perhaps there does not need to be as much office space, people can work virtually, etc., and so many offices are looking to reduce space or adopt space sharing/hoteling.

- There has been positive feedback from businesses on virtual service provision via google, phone, email, etc., especially since most businesses are also working from home and understand. People however are excited for the return to the field.
- Challenges with connectivity and the digital divide are evident. People need connectivity, a basic understanding of computers, or a job that does not involve technology. Organizations are confronting these challenges in a number of ways including: addressing the digital literacy and connectivity gap both during onboarding and after, being an active part of staff's transition virtual, advocating for universal wifi, and sharing hotspots and other resources.
- Productivity has skyrocketed in the virtual environment. Caseloads increased and staff were eager to support and contribute extra to their jobs and to Marylanders during the pandemic. With this increase came some blurred lines, especially around boundary setting. The work from home environment, putting in extra hours, etc., can cause folks to blend their personal and professional lives which is why creating boundaries is critical. Leadership staff should support and encourage boundaries.
- More businesses and employers can be met in the virtual world and it is easier to schedule meetings. The same types of businesses are engaging, but there have been shifts in industry based on need (e.g. manufacturing is a huge industry right now). Businesses are revamping workshare to bring workers back. There has been an urgent need for businesses to hire and so workforce development has stagnated as a result.
- Aspects of business engagement that have been easier during the pandemic are: touching base/connecting with business more frequently, getting higher rates of participation, and general dissemination of information (email and social media). Challenges include going from one meeting to the next without a break, engaging people for long periods of time on video calls, and fostering personal interactions. Virtual models can also save organizations a lot of money.
- Connecting with staff has been easier, but ensuring a personal touch is a challenge in the virtual environment. Some tactics to keep staff morale high include: implementing forty five minute calls so folks have a 15 minute break, not allowing conference calls from 12-5 p.m. on Fridays or on day's staff come back from leave, and permitting staff to go home early if their work is done (task-based over time-based). The idea of work life integration is that sometimes work needs more and sometimes life needs more, it's never a fifty-fifty balance.
- Staff and businesses adapted to the "new way of doing things" successfully because most everyone was forced to adapt at the same time. Many people do not want to go back to how things were, rather they want to move forward and continue to reap the benefits of/explore this new found way of doing work.
- Components of virtual engagement that will stick around include the technology's ability to connect people at greater rates than ever before and engage them in a face to face interactive way with efficiency and ease. Scheduling back to back meetings is something that can go. The technology will have to be moderated to find a healthy balance. Printing is something easier and more cost efficient in the office; however, conferences have better

engagement in-person, but perhaps they can reach more people if virtual options are offered. There is much to consider and the question - what works well and what does not – should guide the move forward to a hybrid landscape.

- To create customized solutions to employer needs, it is imperative that organizations partner and collaborate. Service delivery is a shared effort and should not be competitive. There needs to be a mindset shift, folks lending expertise and a union of partners. Silos must be broken down. It would be helpful for businesses to have a single WIOA point of contact. State strategy should be adjusted to consider small, medium, and large businesses differently, because they have different needs.
- Some takeaways on staff and business engagement in a virtual environment are: the attitude of leaders set the tone; open communication is critical; and people need to be understanding and have patience with others. The shadow a leader casts on its team is reflective of what they will get out of their team.

III. Next Steps and Action Items

- Committee members are asked to send any comments, edits, and questions to Natalie on the takeaways and recommendations from the panel on Access and Participation.