



Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development Executive Committee

Meeting Minutes

Date: April 17, 2023
Time: 1:30 P.M.
Place: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, 900 N. Stiles Ave., Oklahoma City, OK
Attendees: Chuck Gray-chair, Teresa Huggins, Jenna Morey, Michelle Choquette, and Steven Shepelwich
Staff: Susannah Gravley, and Linda Emrich

Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions

Chuck Gray, chair, called the Executive Committee to order. A roll call for attendance was taken and a quorum was announced.

Impact of Don Morris's Departure

Chuck Gray asked Susannah Gravley what kind of impact there might be on OOWD, Oklahoma Works, the Local WDBs, and programs, etc. with Don Morris leaving his position as Director of the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development and what gaps there may be. Chuck said that he would like to get everyone's perspective on what's happening with the Workforce Transformation Task Force and to get Susannah's input on what the Council can do to support the Office of Workforce Development and Oklahoma Works. He's very interested in protecting employees and their salaries, retirement, benefits, etc.

Susannah said that there will be minimum impact and is not concerned with any gaps as she has been asked to be the interim director. Regarding the upcoming changes, if there are any, the biggest concern for our staff is the impact on them if we are switched to another agency which could affect retirements, etc. Our group, OOWD, has been moved twice now and it has affected everyone's retirement accounts, health insurance, etc. There is also concern for staff of our core partners and if they are affected. People need to remember there are Oklahomans involved or impacted with this and it involves their livelihood. People are worried about their jobs. She stated there are a lot of rumors and speculations going around and we want to deal in facts. Susannah said that she did meet with one of the task force members, Karen Pennington, last week and she mentioned that she thought the plan was going to be a pretty vague framework over the next couple of years but will be lacking in a lot of the details.

Jenna Morey asked if there have been any conversations regarding institutional knowledge and retaining employees? Susannah said no, not really. She said that OOWD has 20-21 FTE and there are currently 18 on staff. She would not try and talk someone out of leaving if they have a good opportunity come up.

Chuck said that he talked with Brent Kisling, and he said that he wants to try and keep the Workforce Team at Commerce. Brent told him that Oklahoma Works and the Governor's Council would be subsets to the Secretary of Workforce Development, and they are looking at some broader things that Oklahoma Works isn't equipped to support for example OOWD has certain requirements for supporting

Dislocated Workers, Veterans, etc. But from a broader perspective, if there is an industry that comes in and they say “we need an X number of people skilled up in this area”, and the people don’t meet the requirements that WIOA has, the Secretary then could bring in state resources to help train them so that they can get into the economic development side and say “yes, we can train your workforce and it will take this amount of time of training at that particular rate, which will be a supplement to the contributions to what WIOA would make.

Jenna said from a provider’s perspective, that the funding she gets from COWIB is absolutely critical to being able to employ the types of women that they are trying to get into the workforce. And our state needs them in the workforce as much as they need aerospace workers, etc. Several are becoming truck drivers. Jenna said that every single woman that they serve receives COWIB support.

Steve Shepelwich said that the Governor’s Council brings everyone together including Career Tech and DRS – we all work together although Career Tech and DRS have different secretaries. Will the state still need a Governor’s Council? Chuck said that the Governor’s Council (State Workforce Board) will fall under the Secretary of Workforce Development, so it will still be there. Whether or not the Governor’s Council will have the opportunity to go beyond the WIOA responsibilities, that’s a big question.

It would be good if they could keep the structure of Oklahoma Works the way it is and under Susannah but have access to some state funds. Chuck said that with State money, we could do marketing and advertising and possibly get a mobile unit.

Jenna asked if there are other states where things are divided up into other programs or initiatives and the State Board just focuses on WIOA issues? Maybe the Council can just focus on WIOA and making it the best system it could be and take away all the other distractions. Will the secretary have the authority to tell other partners that they are going to play? Susannah said she’s not sure because Career Tech and DRS for example fall under different secretaries. She thinks there may be some strategy that we could look at.

Susannah added that the Local Workforce Board Directors gave Karen Pennington a “plan” for the Locals, but Karen Pennington told them that it is not the time to better align the Core Partners under the Council, and to your point, yes, the State Board could just administer WIOA, but that’s not what the Federal government intended for it. So, when you’re looking at the intention of and then whether you implement that with the intention behind it, those are two totally different things. Susannah has reached out to Trae Rahill, OESC, Melinda Fruendt, DRS, and Brent Haken, Career Tech, to reconvene the Core Partners meetings because that’s something that’s been done for several years. Both Trae and Brent who are fairly new to their positions are very keen on working together as a system and on a transformation of areas identified that might need changes. We will see what the new Secretary of Workforce will want, and we’ll work with them, but the Governor will still maintain the authority.

Chuck added that Oregon has an organization that they implemented last year that is similar to what Oklahoma is wanting to set-up but didn’t list it in their plan. Oregon had their WIOA money and added about \$121M of state funds to collect the business leaders’ forecasts of the true skills requirements they need going forward. Chuck thinks that without a pragmatic process to collect the required skill sets that businesses are going to need next year or in 2, 5, 10, or 20 years, it’s going to be hard to integrate the Core Partners because you get into higher ed or Career Tech and it really takes a lot of time to change curriculum or set things in place to allow businesses to say –“Hey, I’m going to need another 329 accountants in the next 5 years”.

Chuck asked who was hired as the consultant? Susannah said it was McKinsey Consulting. Chuck asked about \$5M that was appropriated, what happened to that? It was appropriated to the Department of Commerce, and nothing has been done with it. The State Chamber hired a consultant, McKinsey, who is a massive national consulting firm. That started about two years ago to look into what is wrong with workforce development. Jenna asked if Susannah had ever been asked to meet with them. Susannah said that she was in one meeting with them along with Don Morris and Sarah Ashmore and maybe Connie Littleton. The meeting was very vague and very broad with not any true understanding of what we do or how we function.

Chuck said that under the new Cabinet Secretary of Workforce Development, the structure shows OESC. Susannah said that some things in the statute will need to change through legislation which could take at least a year.

Chuck added that Chad Mariska is a fan of Oklahoma Works. Steve asked what value does Chad have of the Council? Chad was the chair of the Business Engagement Committee when he was on the Governor's Council. He sees the Council as an integrater with no teeth. Jenna said that we don't have the money to help business with populations who are outside of WIOA and doesn't meet those conditions. Part of the frustration is our state wants to recruit new businesses into the state and we don't currently have the workforce to support that, but some of those people may be working a \$20/hr. job already right now and have an associate degree and not meet WIOA standards and so how do we upskill that group?

Chuck asked Susannah if she had any insight into our data system – a credible data system where you could do like a one-stop shopping that any agency could use and come out with the same information on what partner skill set requirements are going forward? Susannah said to her knowledge that doesn't exist. Jenna said that the state would need a longitudinal data system that would track everything like completion rates and if DHS was involved and are they receiving benefits and if they've been in a higher education institution and Oklahoma has always been really heavily into not creating that system, which keeps us from knowing where those gaps are and how many people do we have in the state that are on the cusp of making that transition to where we could intervene.

Jenna said that they are here to support Susannah and the workforce team. Chuck asked Susannah what they can do to help her? Susannah said we can do nothing until the Task Force releases its plan. She's been looking at trauma training for the staff. Jenna said that she knows a couple of people who could do the training.

Michelle Choquette said to think about paying to retain people if they are looking for another job. Something to consider is a "retention bonus" and to look at the wage/salary structure. It is critical to the state to retain that institutional knowledge when it comes to WIOA.

Chuck said that he would like to arrange a meeting with the new Secretary of Workforce Development or Susannah might need to do that and articulate the bigger picture.

Teresa Huggins said that she may have some resources to help with staff, also EAP (Employee Assistance Program) is available.

Michelle Choquette asked how is Green Country WDB is doing? The Workforce Team's knowledge on that issue was very beneficial to the state. Susannah said they are doing good now. They have a new executive director, and everyone including their board has been very supportive of Christi. Susannah attended their board meeting recently and all of the board members were very engaged. They will be getting a new board chair starting in July.

Chuck asked Susannah if she could provide to the Council meeting some metrics? She said yes, but not at the April meeting as the performance and program information won't be ready by the meeting date. Jenna suggested that she present some "wins" then. It would be a good opportunity for some people in the room that don't normally attend the Council meeting.

Chuck thanked everyone for coming and due to time, the rest of the agenda items are tabled.

Governor's Council Draft Agenda and Executive Committee's Thoughts/Inputs

Tabled.

Updates on Council Committees

Tabled.

Old Business

None.

New Business

None.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:35 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Linda Emrich*