



CEDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

September 27, 2023

Committee Members Present

George Ambriz, Berkshire Community College
Peter Farkas, Berkshire Community College
Malcolm Fick, BRPC Chair (ex officio)
Kyle Hanlon, BRPC, CEDS Chair
Lesley Herzberg, Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead
Ben Lamb, 1Berkshire
Bryana Malloy, MassHire Berkshires
Laurie Mick, PERC
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
Chris Rembold, Town of Great Barrington
Shannon Smith, Berkshire Agricultural Ventures
Ben Sosne, Berkshire Innovation Center

Committee Alternates Present

Maureen McLaughlin, Berkshire Community College
Kevin Pink, 1Berkshire

Guests Present

Sean O'Donnell, Masswest Area Development Corporation

Not Present

Roger Bolton, Williams College (Retired)
Mike Coakley, City of Pittsfield
A.J. Enchill, Berkshire Black Economic Council
Keith Girouard, Massachusetts Small Business Development Center Network
Ian Rasch, Alander Construction

BRPC Staff Present

Laura Brennan, Economic Development Project Manager
Wylie Goodman, Senior Economic Development Planner
Tom Matuszko, Executive Director

I. Call to Order

Kyle H. called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Laura B. conducted a roll call to establish attendance.

II. Approval of Minutes from May 17, 2023

Chris R. made a motion to approve the May 17, 2023 meeting minutes. Ben S. seconded the motion. The Committee voted to approve the motion. Peter F. abstained.

III. Manufacturing Academy Update – Ben Sosne

Last July the Berkshire Innovation Center (BIC) was awarded a 2-year grant to work with MIT, MassTech Collaborative, General Dynamics, and other local industry partners to develop the manufacturing academy program. The program is an educational experience in which local manufacturing companies nominate employees to take part in a 24-week technical skills, leadership, and management course. The course consists of three phases. In phase I, students learn about problem framing and solving via the DMAIC (define, measure, analyze, improve, control) process. In phase II, students undergo an in-depth simulation in which DMAIC is applied to example problems. In phase III, students work with a mentor from their company and apply DMAIC to a problem specific to their firm.

The first manufacturing academy class is graduating at the beginning of October. The cohort consists of 15 students ranging in age from early 20s to early 50s. BIC is beginning to recruit candidates for the next class, starting in November. Currently, participating companies are pleased with the results and are signing up additional employees. Ben S. thinks that there is value in the program for non-manufacturing companies as the problem-framing, problem-solving, and human skills elements are widely applicable. MIT is also interested in expanding the program beyond the BIC: Ben S. has presented at Northwestern, and MIT has suggested franchising the program.

Kyle H. commented that the program also has social value in helping people new to the Berkshires engage more with the community and meet like-minded people. Ben S. agreed.

Laura B. asked how BIC was planning for program sustainability after the grant money expires. Ben S. said that BIC was considering drawing on Workforce Training Fund grants as well as having participating companies pay for the program. He also said that he anticipates the total cost to reduce as development costs fall with each iteration.

IV. Economic Development District funding update – Laura Brennan

The Economic Development Agency (EDA) designated Berkshire County an Economic Development District at the beginning of 2022. In late August 2023, BRPC was invited to apply for EDD funding and secured 3 years of partial staff funding for BRPC EDD work. This work comprises all elements of CEDS implementation, including pursuing declared regional goals, supporting priority projects, and developing new priority projects.

Kyle H. asked how the funds would be dispersed. Laura B. said that they were strictly for internal BRPC staff time, specifically for Laura B. and Wylie G.'s work.

V. 2023-2027 Berkshire County CEDS – Year 1 PRR to EDA – Laura Brennan

i. Adjustment to EDA's reporting schedule

Due to Berkshire County being designated an EDD and receiving EDA funding, the CEDS reporting schedule has been shifted from a calendar year cycle to a fiscal year cycle (June 30 due date). BRPC and the CEDS committee thus have an additional six months to compile and file the FY24 CEDS annual report.

ii. Summary Background Data

The advantage of being migrated to a fiscal year cycle means that the CEDS annual report will be able to use more current 5-year American Community Survey demographic and economic data than previously.

iii. Priority Projects – Updates and New Submissions

Laura B. has set a December 31st deadline for new priority projects to be submitted. In the new year, these will be discussed, and either added to the current list of priority projects or categorized differently. Priority projects should be regionally impactful in terms of economic development, and BRPC favors those seeking state or federal funding. A link for priority project submission is on the meeting agenda.

VI. Project Proposal: Small Business Resiliency Assessment Tool – Laura Brennan

For the past two-and-a-half years, BRPC has been working on a CARES Act-funded recovery and resilience effort that includes planning, outreach to local businesses and nonprofits, and partnerships with local partners. One of the objectives that was identified early on was the desire to help small businesses assess their vulnerabilities (economic, environmental, health, etc.) and work on resiliency efforts. This was partially inspired by FEMA small business resiliency projects in other regions of the country (New Orleans, Rhode Island).

The vision for the project is an online tool where small businesses can answer questions regarding the nature of their business and specific vulnerabilities and be given recommendations for improving resiliency. These suggestions would also include estimates of the time and cost needed to implement such solutions, as well as a comprehensive directory of local partners and technical assistance providers who can assist with and potentially fund implementation, such as local chambers of commerce and state agencies. An additional benefit of this tool is that it could provide a focal point for the Berkshire County small business advocacy/technical assistance ecosystem. Local partners have also expressed interest in using such a tool to improve intake efficiency.

Currently, BRPC has drafted the questions for different business types that would underlie and guide the user experience. BRPC has been invited by EDA to submit an application to move into phase II, which would involve testing software, onboarding technical assistance providers, promotion and marketing, and roll-out. BRPC is preparing an abstract for EDA.

VII. Berkshire Funding Focus Update – Laura Brennan

Berkshire Funding Focus is a BRPC program run by Karen Pelto that provides support for Berkshire County grant seekers of all types. The program has directly assisted in the award of over \$2 million of grant monies, with an additional \$8-\$10 million pending. In year 1, the program was funded by a \$75,000 earmark secured by Senator Hinds and private contributions from County partners. For year 2, Senator Mark has secured an additional \$75,000 earmark, and Mill Town Foundation and Berkshire Bank Foundation have made funding commitments. To maintain level funding, an additional \$35,000-\$45,000 in fundraising is needed.

VIII. Adjournment

Ben L. made a motion to adjourn. Lesley H. seconded the motion. Laura B. took a roll call vote to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m.

Laura B. will follow up with a poll regarding potential guest presentations at future meetings.

Next Meeting – To be determined.