



City of Somerville Job Creation & Retention Trust (JCRT) Monthly Meeting

Anika Van Eaton, Managing
Trustee
Vickie Choitz, Managing Trustee

Trustees
Thomas Bent
Silvana Dinka
Jim Hachey
Jacob Luria
Wilfred Mbah
Rachel Nadkarni
Rand Wilson

Meeting Minutes

Location: Hybrid: via Zoom Meeting and in-person at 167-169 Holland St, Somerville
Date: August 20, 2026
Time: 6:30 PM

Attendance

- Trustees: Thomas Bent, Vickie Choitz, Jim Hachey, Rachel Nadkarni, and Anika Van Eaton
- Economic Development Staff: William Blackmer

Meeting Minutes

A Van Eaton: Meeting called to order at 6:45pm. Quorum established with 5 trustees in attendance.

W Blackmer delivered house rules about technology.

1. Review and approval of past meeting minutes

a. Vote to approve July 16th meeting minutes

Motion: T Bent makes motion to approve July 16th meeting minutes. V Choitz seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0.

W Blackmer will follow up to share course outlines for the Good Municipal Jobs-funded programs with Board members in advance of next meeting.

2. Review Received and Estimated Linkage Fees for 2026

W Blackmer: The current uncommitted balance sits just above \$2.6M. There's approximately \$500,000 we are anticipating from 1 project that is wrapping up. Currently, the Trust isn't projected to receive any other funds linkage payments in the next few years.

T Bent: Is 74 Middlesex still waiting on a permanent certificate of occupancy?

R Nadkarni: Yes, I spoke with their team earlier this week and we are working together on some final pieces which will allow us to invoice and then grant the permanent certificate of occupancy upon payment.

3. Updates on Active Programs and Upcoming Programs

W Blackmer: There are 14 programs actively running. Next month's meeting will include an update on the Youth PACMAN program. They may be interested in requesting a no-cost extension as the team behind this project has continued to work with residents who are still looking for employment opportunities.

4. Review draft schedule for upcoming meeting topics and next request for proposals (RFP)

W Blackmer: Since last meeting, we've made some revisions to this schedule to show the meeting topics we've

covered this year and indicate next steps as we work toward the annual meeting and releasing our next request for proposals.

A Van Eaton: Tonight, we'll reflect on last month's CTE presentation and hear about recent meetings that the Economic Development Division has had with key employers. The subcommittee is going to meet next week to discuss learnings from this year's presentations, review last year's RFP, and work on incorporating learnings and findings into the 2027 RFP draft. Next month's Board meeting will include updates from our grantees and a preview of the annual report. We will also begin preparing for the November annual meeting.

In October, we will finalize prep for the annual meeting and review the 2027 RFP draft. In November, we will hold the annual meeting and have space to get community feedback to incorporate into the final 2027 RFP. The RFP will be finalized in December and then the RFP will launch in January. Are there any questions about this process?

5. Reflections on CTE Presentation with regards to upcoming RFP and ongoing grantmaking

A Van Eaton: Last month, Jim and Tom presented on Career and Technical Education Programming. What are Board Members' thoughts around how that presentation informs our next RFP and how it may inform the JCRT's grant making over the next couple of years.

T Bent: The presentation highlighted the need for a driver's education program for high school students in Somerville to expand access to co-ops.

R Nadkarni: Since this is a barrier for both youth and adults, maybe we could consider a fund for this for residents to get a stipend to go out and pursue driver's education wherever they choose. When we are doing employer outreach related to our next RFP and our annual meeting, we should include driver's education schools and mention that there has been interest in funding these initiatives as a tool for workforce development.

A Van Eaton: Do we know when and why Somerville High stopped offering driver's education courses?

J Hachey: I'm not sure when it ended, but it used to be hosted at the high school right after the school day which was beneficial because it captured a captive audience and a single cohort could train 20-25 students.

V Choitz: According to Google it was offered by Somerville High, later subcontracted out to a vendor, and then stopped entirely in 2014-2015 due to budget. I agree with Rachel's idea of including them on our outreach list. I also agree with releasing a broad enough RFP so that a wide variety of programming, including programs like driver's education will fit its parameters. Another idea following last month's presentations was Rachel's idea about providing funding to students for co-ops or paid internships at nonprofit organizations who may be interested in hosting internship students.

R Nadkarni: The minimum award size for the 2027 RFP might need to be lowered, or maybe we do not include a minimum award size so that we can be open to organizations looking to run a smaller program such as hosting 1 or 2 interns. Last RFP round our smallest awards were around \$50,000.

J Hachey: Under Chapter 74 regulations, students on co-op do need to be supervised by a licensed individual, such as a license carpenter. The company also needs to have worker's compensation, and to complete a background check. I like the idea of expanding funded co-ops, but we should keep these requirements in-mind.

6. Sharing back findings from conversations with key employers and Somerville Chamber of Commerce

W Blackmer: As we dive into this topic, I wanted to introduce Jen Lawrence, the Acting Director of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce.

J. Lawrence: Hello, I'm the Executive Director of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, a long-time Somerville resident, raising my daughter in Somerville Public Schools, and have 20-plus years in workforce development.

W Blackmer: Thank you. Since our last meeting, Dana, Rachel, and I have met with the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, TransMedics, and Mass General Brigham.

Macro-level trends:

- *We are in a unique, ever-changing hiring climate. The adoption of artificial intelligence as well as the "silver tsunami" or aging population are two of the many factors we are contending with.*
- *Very high competition for vacant roles*
- *Many applicants have experienced prolonged unemployment/underemployment*
- *It's taking a while to find a job that's a good fit*
- *The economy is contributing to challenging business decisions (i.e. hiring projections, risks, etc.)*

Somerville Context:

- *Employers have pride in hiring Somerville residents*
- *They are also open to hiring individuals with various levels of education and experience*
- *Varying levels of familiarity with the Somerville workforce development ecosystem*
- *High costs of living in Somerville and Massachusetts do pose recruitment and retention challenges*

Desired Competencies and Skills:

- *Learned and Lived Experience*
- *Confidence, Self-Advocacy*
- *Communication and English language proficiency*
- *Timeliness and being present at work*
- *Help businesses leverage technology and Artificial Intelligence*
- *Adaptability, Schedule flexibility, openness to working in-person*

Engaging Employers:

- *Not a one-size-fits all approach, multiple strategies for engagement*
- *Build trust and rapport working up to higher levels of engagement over time*
- *Provide a menu and/or calendar of opportunities for employers*
- *Strategic pairings between ed/training providers and employers*

T Bent: I found the strategic pairings point to be very interesting. Employers, such as TransMedics, have varying talent needs. It would be great to have employers partner with different training providers to develop a proposal to the next RFP round. Employer buy-in is very important. Training providers should make sure that they are addressing the basic desired skills and competencies in their training programs. We need to keep having conversations with employers to understand their needs whether or not they can hire today because it takes time to train people.

R Nadkarni: An important takeaway for me is that we should temper our expectations from employers. It takes time for an employer to build trust with a training or educational institution. Partnership building is a "long game" that takes several years. Over time, trust can build and employers may feel comfortable engaging more with a training provider and partnering more closely. Nonprofits need to meet employers where they are at. Ultimately, you want the employer to have confidence that if someone graduates from a program, they are highly comfortable recommending that person to a hiring manager at their organization.

V Choitz: We have a real structural problem because non-profits often don't know what funding they are going to have for their next round of programming. It's a conundrum because we are asking the nonprofit organizations to play the long game and build trusting relationships with employers, but at the same time, structural business models make this a challenge. I'm not sure how we get around this.

Something my organization has been hearing at the national level is that employers are using third-party applications and they are screening out many candidates if their profiles do not match specific keywords. Jen, are you seeing employers using this software, or are you seeing any employers that are still reviewing applications and resumes by hand?

J Lawrence: Yes, many smaller employers are still reviewing applications by hand. They care about looking at the applicant beyond whether their resume is super polished. Unfortunately, screening tools, including artificial intelligence, do overlook the nuances and they are becoming more prevalent. In addition to education and training partners building trust and credibility, employers are also concerned about how their businesses will weather the economy. They may want to grow, hire more, and become engaged with training partners, but this is partially dependent on the overall strength of the economy.

V Choitz: One solution we've seen nationally is that employers will at least agree to interview the graduates so that they can keep the graduates in mind for opportunities when they hopefully do arise.

R Nadkarni: In the RFP, we should ask proposers to tell us how they plan to engage employers and to give examples. It would be great to see employer commitment letters that mention the ways that employers will engage with the training, whether it is presenting to the class, holding mock interviews, arranging a job shadowing experience, etc.

T Bent: We may want to consider having some funding for training our training providers on topics such as artificial intelligence, job applications, and resumes.

A Van Eaton: Companies have been using key words for screening applicants for a while, so I am curious to learn more about how this has changed in recent years.

V Choitz: For decades, the onus has been on training providers to develop business relationships with employers. I'm wondering if we should put more of an expectation on companies to be responsible for developing these relationships, especially if they are having trouble finding talent.

J Lawrence: We can encourage it. I worry that small and medium-sized businesses might not have the capacity to do this. But, the Chamber could help with coordinating meet and greets between employers and training providers.

R Nadkarni: This is like the role that we have offered to play with TransMedics to help connect them to relevant training and education partners and to expose them to our workforce development landscape.

V Choitz: That may be a relationship model to document and then scale up.

R Nadkarni: These conversations can also help nonprofits find program areas of expertise, so that they are not trying to move in too many different programmatic directions.

A Van Eaton: This points back to the structural challenges because funders are mostly interested in new and innovative projects and this can require nonprofits to shift and adapt programs to match funders interests and can make it challenging for nonprofits to continue a throughline of programming. Is Somerville part of the Healthcare Careers Consortium?

W Blackmer: No, but it is on my list to connect with the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and other municipalities to see how we can work together to work with employers.

R Nadkarni: The subcommittee should also discuss the length of time that we are open to funding a program to support program continuity.

T Bent: Do you think there's buy-in from the employers you spoke with to engage with our nonprofit providers on proposing a training?

W Blackmer: I think different companies have different levels of experience engaging with Somerville workforce development providers, but I do like the idea of bringing employers together and making sure they understand what programs are offered locally.

V Choitz: There are a lot of great resources on this subject, "sector strategy" or "industry partnerships" that William and others should look into to support this work.

R Nadkarni: We need to work on better regional integration between employers and training partners.

7. Adjournment

Motion: T Bent makes motion to adjourn. J Hachey seconds the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Motion passes by vote of 5-0.

Meeting Materials:

- 8/20/26 Mtg Notice and Agenda
- draft 7/16/26 Mtg Minutes
- JCRT Received and Estimated Linkage Fees (8.10.26)
- JCRT Investment Priority Tracker (8.10.26)
- August 2026 Memo Re: Revised Schedule for Meeting Topics and Next RFP
- Employer Engagement PowerPoint

Approved 9/17/2026