

**JOB TRAINING INCENTIVE  
PROGRAM MONTHLY BOARD  
MEETING**

**Virtual Meeting**

**MEETING SUMMARY OF May 12, 2023**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Board Members**

Mark Roper, EDD Division Director, Board Chair  
Sara Gutierrez, EDD Deputy Division Director  
Monica Sandoval-Johnson, STEM Boomerang  
Michelle Doran, Department of Workforce Solutions  
Kathleen Sena, NM Higher Education Department  
Karla Melendez, NM Public Education Department

**Board Members Absent**

Marcos Martinez, Department of Workforce Solutions  
Marc Duske, NM Public Education Department

**JTIP Staff Present**

Patrick Gannon, JTIP Manager  
Avelina Borrego, Marketing Coordinator  
Jennifer Prada, JTIP Program Administrator

**Guests**

Robert Bellemare, Gridworks, Inc.  
Teresa Thilmoney, Gridworks, Inc.  
Angela Valdez, Gridworks, Inc  
Parin Kumar, Vana, LLC  
Riddhi Bhakta, Vana, LLC  
Tina Disik, Vana, LLC  
Kevin Wilson, NMEDD Regional Representative  
Maria Guzman, United Poly Systems  
Greer Sullivan, United Poly Systems  
Greg Purdle, United Poly Systems  
Bruce Tucker, United Poly Systems  
Alex Marucci, Higher Cultures, LLC  
Peyton Johnson, Higher Cultures, LLC  
Tiffany Clark, Higher Cultures, LLC  
Rianon Lobato, Higher Cultures, LLC  
Kevin O'Shea, NM Public Education Department  
Karen Huladek

## **I. Introductions**

The meeting convened at 9:03 am. The introduction of board and staff followed.

## **II. Approval of the Amended Agenda**

Motion to approve the amended agenda was made by Ms. Sena and seconded by Ms. Doran. Motion passed unanimously.

## **III. Consideration of Proposals**

### **a) Gridworks, Inc. fka Affordable Solar Installation, Inc. – Albuquerque**

The company requested a total of \$606,141.36 for 43 trainees at an average wage of \$32.36 per hour. The company has been approved for JTIP on nine previous occasions.

The company expressed appreciation for the opportunity; has seen incredible growth; are now at 150 employees and anticipates more; is more than doubling this year; battery storage is coming in (1 GW), they are building a big battery business. Ms. Doran asked about any challenges with hiring as they only hired 3 previously. The company stated that supply chain issues due to COVID, contracts taking 2-3 times longer, costs on solar materials and a major cancellation were issues they faced. Chairman Roper expressed that their retention rate was about 48% and the company stated that they had challenges due to COVID and some employees moved on for higher wages. Since then, wages have been increased and the company has allowed for working remotely.

A motion to approve this request was made by Ms. Doran and seconded by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson. Motion passed unanimously.

### **b) Vana, LLC – Clovis**

The company requested a total of \$67,993.04 for 5 trainees at an average wage of \$21.39 per hour. The company has been approved for JTIP on one previous occasion.

The company expressed appreciation and stated that they faced challenges due to the construction process; they are the first manufacturing company of their kind; were able to fill 7 of 15 previous jobs and get out a lot of products. Ms. Sandoval-Johnson stated that the wages for Director and Office Administrator were a little low and the company stated that they were based on the current Clovis market. They are recruiting from the community college, Indeed and employee recommendations. Workforce Solutions/Connections is not an option due to cannabis. Ms. Doran posted a link to wages that are paid in the area for the company to review. Mr. O'Shea toured the facility and said it was top notch. Chairman Roper stated that 2023 is looking good financially for the company.

A motion to approve this request was made by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson and seconded by Ms. Sena. Motion passed unanimously.

### **c) Atkore, Inc. dba United Poly Systems - Albuquerque**

The company requested a total of \$65,090.00 for 10 trainees at an average wage of \$19.95 per hour. The company has been approved for JTIP on two previous occasions.

The company expressed appreciation and stated that they are excited for the opportunity; since they acquired the company in June 2022, an increase in customer

demand has occurred; has opportunities around the world in residential, non-residential, construction, repair, and remodeling. Mr. Tucker gave details about their broadband product and stated that they have had incredible growth, not only with tribes but with rural schools, etc. Ms. Sandoval-Johnson asked about the challenges they've had since they only claimed 2 employees previously, to which they replied that they aren't sure since they now pretty much have a brand-new team. Ms. Guzman stated that they are using Indeed and AbCore Career website for recruiting. COVID was challenging, however, during the job fair this week, they received several applications.

A motion to approve this request was made by Ms. Melendez and seconded by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson. Motion passed unanimously.

**d) Higher Cultures, LLC – Las Cruces**

*The company requested a total of \$111,272.00 for 15 trainees at an average wage of \$20.20 per hour. This is the first time the company has applied for JTIP.*

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The company expressed appreciation and stated that they are looking forward to being here in NM and providing opportunities for employees in the Las Cruces area. Ms. Sena asked about their dental plan, to which they stated that they are hoping to get a dental plan next year in March; Ms. Sandoval-Johnson asked about the Lab Manager position and the qualifications needed, to which they stated that they are looking for direct expertise in manufacturing and has 1 quality NMSU graduate with a Chemical Engineering degree in mind; they are working with a professor at Dona Ana Community College for a business course. Chairman Roper stated that their profit margin/liquidity was low to which Mr. Marucci stated he expects it to change. The Oregon market was incredibly tough; 2022 had the lowest price per pound on outdoor material, which took out 20-30% of outdoor growers and was \$40-\$60 below cost to produce. Expanding costs were high but 2023 will be better, margin wise and expansion wise.

A motion to approve this request was made by Ms. Monica Sandoval-Johnson and seconded by Ms. Sena. Motion passed unanimously.

**IV. Updated financial review for the following companies approved on April 14, 2023**

- a. Amfabsteel, Inc. – Bernalillo
- b. Phat Steel, Inc. – Bernalillo
  - Last month there was an oversight to provide financial analyst information to review. The board received the reviews and there were no findings.

**V. Approval of Minutes**

- a. JTIP Board meeting April 14, 2023 - a motion was made by Ms. Doran and seconded by Ms. Melendez. Motion passed unanimously.

**VI. Fiscal Update**

Mr. Gannon shared the fiscal report and the projects in the pipeline. There are potentially 18 companies for June's board meeting, one of which may be Intel and Meow Wolf is expected in July. Ms. Sena asked if JTIP funds revert if not spent to

which Chairman Roper stated that they do not.

## VII. Other (Discussion Items)

- a. Final Review and Adoption of Final Rule - Chairman Roper stated that the board would vote on each individual item. Mr. Gannon went over each of the items as follows:

Trainees hired through a temporary staffing agency may be considered for JTIP positions. The conditions for eligibility are outlined in the Trainee Qualifications and Requirements section of this policy manual.

A motion was made by Ms. Doran and seconded by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson. Chairman Roper voted no. Motion passed.

COVID-19 Health Emergency – Remove from JTIP Policy Manual entirely for FY24.

A motion was made by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson and seconded by Ms. Melendez. Motion passed unanimously.

Custom classroom training.

Ms. Sena asked if apprenticeship in construction/tech types were eligible and Chairman Roper stated yes, but it's not a typical type for JTIP.

A motion was made by Ms. Sena and seconded by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson. Motion passed unanimously.

JTIP approved employers that utilize business support services through the recognized New Mexico Workforce Connection offices across the state or through other independent human resource support service providers that help small businesses develop successful recruitment strategies to grow and retain their workforce may be eligible for an additional 5% wage reimbursement above the standard rates.

A change was made to take out the reference to 24 and to remove the and to be replaced with or because the NM Register doesn't allow for and/or. Ms. Sandoval-Johnson asked for the difference between Workforce Connection and Workforce Solutions, to which Ms. Huladek stated that Workforce Connections has many offices such as Workforce Solutions. Ms. Gutierrez suggested that the JTIP Glossary definition be taken out and put in policy instead. Chairman Roper

stated that it can be more descriptive in policy as to what is not eligible, the current definition is ok.

A motion was made by Chairman Roper. Motion passed unanimously.

### Step-Up

Chairman Roper stated that Step-Up is greatly underutilized and anyway we can help is good.

A motion was made by Ms. Sena and seconded by Ms. Sandoval-Johnson. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Roper stated that these changes will be in effect July 2023 (FY24). Mr. Gannon stated that they will be published on June 27, 2023. Ms. Sandoval-Johnson asked if those that have applied prior to FY24 would be eligible for the additional 5%, to which Ms. Gutierrez replied, no.

#### **b. Next Board Meeting**

- i. June 9, 2023; 9:00 am -12:00 pm; Virtual

### **VIII. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by Chairman Roper. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 10:45 am.