

Jobs Creation and Retention Trust (JCRT) Board of Trustees application

Anika Van Eaton

1. Identify which category of public seat you are applying for (local nonprofit, local business, or resident) and describe your interest in participating on this board.

I am applying for a public seat as an employee of a workforce development nonprofit. I live in Union Square in Somerville, and I am a Senior Research Analyst for the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), Boston's workforce development board. I am excited about the opportunity to apply for the Job Creation and Retention Trust Board of Trustees to work within our city with employers, schools, and workforce development organizations to support Somerville residents in building economic power and attaining fulfilling careers.

2. What has been your interaction with the workforce development system, agencies, or nonprofits as a job seeker, employer, professional, or other stakeholder?

At the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), the city's workforce development board, I have worked within the workforce development system on the Greater Boston Regional Workforce Plan. Under guidance from the Massachusetts Skills Cabinet, the Boston PIC collaborated with the MetroNorth REB and MetroSouthwest workforce board to create the Greater Boston Workforce Planning Blueprint to align area K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, workforce training programs, and employer groups to support career pathways into occupations the group identified as priorities: healthcare and technology. I worked with the Boston PIC and partners on the creation of the Blueprint, and am now the PIC's project manager for the implementation of the Blueprint, responsible for facilitating continuous measurement and work on the goals of increasing access to high-demand, high-wage, undersupplied healthcare and technology occupations.

The PIC focuses on the Boston Public Schools as a talent pipeline to connect the city's young people, the majority of whom are young people of color, to the city's growing industries. The Boston PIC is a partner with the City of Boston's Mayor's Summer Jobs Program, and places approximately 1,500 high school students in private sector, employer-paid summer jobs every year. I have worked with the PIC's high school and college programs to manage, analyze, and report on the student metrics we track to measure our progress and facilitate discussions with the staff to inform practice.

Through my role with the PIC, I also provide labor market analysis to external partners and to inform the work of the PIC's sector organizing through the Healthcare Careers Consortium and Tech Hire. In addition, I have supported the PIC's Workforce Council as an RFP evaluator for Boston's Career Center Access Points, remote career center partners embedded in community neighborhoods, and as a reader for the annual performance review of the career centers. The PIC's Workforce Council oversees the distribution of federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding, which supports the city's two career centers and training investments.

I have also volunteered for a nonprofit organization as a jobs mentor, doing resume editing and interview preparation for women who were being supported out of homelessness, and I volunteer as a salary negotiation trainer to share labor market and salary negotiation skills with predominantly female job seekers.

My experiences working within the workforce development system on regional planning, awarding funding and determining performance metrics, labor market analysis, and programmatic measurement and evaluation would inform my perspective as a Somerville Job Creation and Retention Trust Board member.

3. Have you served on a nonprofit board or governmental advisory committee in the past or currently? If so, what is one lesson would you take from that experience to the Job Creation and Retention Trust Board of Trustees?

While I have not served on a nonprofit board or governmental advisory committee, I participated in the committee of workforce development professionals convened by the Boston PIC who conducted the performance reviews of Boston's WIOA-funded career centers. A valuable lesson I learned from this experience was the importance of meeting facilitation to avoid groupthink and encourage the sharing of different viewpoints. This could be achieved by rotating who facilitates, by having the facilitator share pros and cons and offer counter arguments, and by creating a meeting environment where one person is not permitted to dominate the conversation. When it is time to make a decision, it is important to allow enough time in the schedule for review of the relevant materials and information, and sufficient time for discussion. I found it important to have every committee member clearly state their stance, because this prompts people to think through their opinion enough to articulate it, and generates opportunities for constructive discussion.

4. What do you believe is the biggest threat facing the regional labor market in the next 10 years?

The biggest threat the region is facing is a labor market that does not work for all workers. Greater Boston is experiencing the bifurcation of the labor market as growth is concentrated in higher paying occupations that require a bachelor's degree or more, and lower paying food service, accommodations, and retail trade occupations. At the same time, businesses are automating and fragmenting into lower-paying jobs the middle-skill occupations that used to provide a middle-class wage. The Boston area has seen some wage growth in the occupations requiring a bachelor's degree or higher. The minimal wage growth in the lowest paid occupations has been driven primarily by increases in the state minimum wage. The cost of living in the Boston area continues to outpace the increases in both the minimum wage and overall wage growth, meaning that while unemployment rates are very low in the Boston region, there are significant numbers of people who are working but cannot truly afford to live here. The challenge of finding a job that can support housing costs is compounded by the overextended transportation system that is not reliable enough for workers commuting across Greater Boston for employment.

Furthermore, disaggregation of Greater Boston unemployment rates show stark differences between White job seekers and Black, Latino, and Asian job seekers, as well as large differences in unemployment rates by level of educational attainment, with unemployment rates much lower for those with a college degree, compared to those without a college degree.

For the Greater Boston region's labor market to contribute to the economic prosperity of all residents, we need a labor market that has accessible entry points that lead to career advancement for people of all education levels. With the threats of job fragmentation and automation, workers need to be able to build new skills to prepare for changing technology and types of jobs. Employers should facilitate this upskilling in partnership with workforce development and education institutions. Workforce development planning should focus on training transferable technology, digital literacy, and interpersonal skills to prepare people for changing job markets, and should prioritize working with businesses that provide living wages and offer upward mobility for employees. Secondary and postsecondary schools and other credentialing providers should create programs of study in partnership with the high-wage, growing business community to ensure they are preparing their students with the needed skill sets. Employers should build career ladders with clear opportunities for wage increases and career growth, and provide living wages for all employees when they start.

5. What do you believe is the most urgent issue facing job seekers or employers today that the Job Creation and Retention Trust could address?

With businesses planning on moving to and growing in Somerville with the upcoming development, the JCRT should prepare Somerville residents to participate in employment with these companies. Job seekers do not know enough about new employment opportunities or how to secure these jobs. The JCRT could provide guidance to job seekers by identifying priority training areas based on labor market demand. Businesses will benefit from hiring local talent in Somerville. The JCRT could support existing and the development of:

- English classes for adult ESOL residents that connect them to workforce training or college programs connected to incoming Somerville employers at the completion of their classes.
- Organizations that would partner with employers to help them develop and show transparent career ladders for their companies with training opportunities, develop employee assistance and retention programs, and advertise open positions to Somerville job seekers.

Concurrently, it is important to continue to prepare Somerville's young people for attaining fulfilling careers. Building on the work of the Somerville High School, the JCRT could support youth employment programming to connect Somerville High School students and recent high school graduates without college plans to internships, job shadows, and other experiential learning opportunities with Somerville businesses. The JCRT could support programming that teaches young people the business and strategy skills to be entrepreneurs and business owners, both to support Somerville's creative and visionary young people in thinking of their own business ideas and to instill skills that are transferrable to other work environments.

In both planning to address the urgent needs of currently unemployed Somerville residents and the long-term planning to prepare Somerville's young people to navigate their careers, the JCRT's criteria for determining funding should be grounded in the values identified in the Somerville Talent Equity Playbook. This includes training programs and job placements that prepare people for jobs with predictable schedules and career advancement opportunities that pay enough to live in Somerville. The JCRT should fund programming that emphasizes those most at disadvantage in the current Somerville labor market by funding access and support to English language learners, the unemployed, those without a college degree, and those who are financially precarious. The JCRT should also be preemptive by supporting career exploration and career pathways for Somerville's young people.