Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

**APPROVED**
**AUGUST 4, 2026**

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board**
**Special Populations Committee**
**Meeting Minutes**
**April 30, 2026, via Zoom at 11:00 a.m.**

| Members Attending | Members Absent | Staff & Guests Attending |
|---|---|---|
| Corey Johns | Jordan Osborne | Marla Rye |
| Freda Herndon | Nathan Garrett | Meagan Dobbins |
| George "Bo" Callis | | Ginger Fussell |
| Mary Lear | | Alyssa Spaulding |
| Brandon Phinx | | |
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The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Special Populations Committee met via Zoom on April 30, 2026 at 11:00 a.m. With a quorum confirmed, Freda Herndon called the meeting to order. Bo Callis moved to approve the minutes, and Freda Herndon seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

**WIOA Report**
Meagan Dobbins presented the federal performance report. Most Adult measures were at or above 90% of negotiated goals. Dislocated Worker performance met expectations except Measurable Skill Gains, which was 66.6% against a passing target of 66.96%. Several participants earned gains in April that would appear in fourth-quarter results, and improvement was expected by year-end. Youth Median Earnings also improved and was trending toward passing. Meagan did not anticipate any Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth measures failing for the program year. Negotiations for the next two years of goals were expected in May and June, with possible increases to Dislocated Worker standards.

Marla updated the committee on the closure of eight American Job Centers approved February 11. The state confirmed that the decision aligned with its direction to reduce facility costs. Affected landlords were notified April 1 that the locations would be vacated by the end of June. Staff were coordinating facility closeout and seeking alternative local meeting space for customers. Workforce Essentials owns buildings in Cheatham, Robertson, and Williamson counties and was seeking partners to occupy them and help cover operating costs. The buildings would no longer operate as American Job Centers, and WIOA Title I funds could not pay for internet or utilities. Potential arrangements included partnerships with Mid-

Cumberland Human Resource Agency in Robertson County, a staffing and training agency in Williamson County, Nashville State Community College in Humphreys County, and a renovated former National Guard armory in Houston County. Wilson County remained the primary location without a replacement plan.

Meagan reviewed third-quarter Career Service Provider performance. After no second-quarter enrollment goals were met due to the holiday season, staff increased monitoring, emphasized short-term training, and raised the individual training limit from $2,500 to $4,000. All third-quarter enrollment goals were met except Dislocated Worker, which improved from 43% to 71%. Exits remained below the goal of at least 80% of new enrollments, and Nashville staffing vacancies continued to affect performance. Cumulative enrollments were approximately 68% of the annual goal. Natalie McLimore scheduled a May 7 all-staff meeting to reinforce expectations for enrollments, caseload management, closures, and exits.

**Employer Grants**

Marla reviewed the employer grant portfolio. Northern Middle had awarded 18 Incumbent Worker Training grants supporting 223 employees, with approximately $57K of the $300K allocation expended. Staff were urging employers to submit invoices and complete expenditures by the end of May for closeout by June 30. Eleven apprenticeship grants had been awarded, approximately $180K obligated, and most employers had submitted reimbursement requests. Brandon Phinx announced his appointment as Tennessee's State Apprenticeship Director and said the state planned a more strategic, data-driven approach to expanding Registered Apprenticeship. The apprenticeship office was developing a Funding Opportunity Announcement for intermediary organizations that could connect employers, industries, and education providers. Corey Johns asked about the role of intermediaries, and Brandon explained that industry associations and chambers of commerce could convene partners and expand programs. George "Bo" Callis asked about minimum qualifications and ERISA funding. Brandon said Tennessee, as a State Apprenticeship Agency, could approve programs on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor, often within one or two weeks after receiving complete documentation. Additional research was needed regarding ERISA funding.

Marla reported that three employers were in the pipeline for the State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula grant, although no contracts had been executed. She also reviewed a healthcare-specific Incumbent Worker Training initiative with the Tennessee Hospital Association. Ten healthcare employers had received grants, and all funds were obligated. Workforce Essentials slightly over-obligated the grant in anticipation of possible underspending or withdrawals, with regular Incumbent Worker Training funds available to cover any remaining overage. No funds had yet been expended, requiring close coordination to complete spending by June 30. Marla announced that NM had received a $250K Rural Healthcare grant for a second round of paramedic training. The grant would continue the Vol. State partnership and add Austin Peay as a training provider, improving access for participants from Stewart, Houston, and Humphreys counties. The award supported the board's broader healthcare sector strategy.

**Target Populations**
Marla updated the committee on the Community Reinvestment and Reentry Grant, also known as the Second Chance program. NM's two-week manufacturing readiness program with Nissan had reached its fifth cohort and served approximately 50 Rutherford County recovery court participants. Attendance and participation were strong, but Nissan's hiring process was more restrictive than expected, and only one participant had cleared it for employment. Northern Middle, the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, and Rutherford Works planned a May 14 job fair for program graduates. In Humphreys County, NM partnered with Hope Ministries to provide recovery participants with forklift and flooring training. Approximately six participants were employed.

**New Grant Opportunities**
Meagan Dobbins updated the committee on the Youth Employment Program, scheduled to end June 30. NM had applied for an additional $750K beginning July 1 and anticipated no approval issues. NM partnered with TCAT Dickson to provide paid clinical experiences for dental assistant students who otherwise would have completed the required work without compensation. The funding reduced travel and financial barriers for rural students, including those from Humphreys and Houston counties, and supported their transition into employment. The program's Vocational Rehabilitation component also supported Project SEARCH with the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System. A small group of students was completing work-based learning at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Clarksville, formerly Tennova Healthcare, working approximately 36 to 40 hours per week and attending Friday job-readiness instruction. NM was also pursuing a partnership with the Tennessee School for the Blind before the grant ended. Meagan noted that enrollment, payroll, and timesheet activity typically increased when students left school for the summer, making the final months the busiest.

**26-27 WIOA Plan Modification**
Marla reviewed development of the new WIOA local strategic plan. The state issued guidance March 11, NM released the draft for public comment April 10, held a listening session April 20, and submitted the plan April 24. State feedback was expected before the May 8 presentation to the State Workforce Development Board. Ferrol Thomas would discuss healthcare initiatives, and Freda Herndon would represent Adult Education.

Marla also discussed state-requested federal waivers that could replace the nine local workforce areas with three regional planning councils. Local areas had been advised to delay major procurements and avoid long-term contracts while structural changes were considered. The Finance Committee therefore recommended renewing the One-Stop Operator contract for no more than 12 months with a termination provision for future state directives. Marla expected operations through December to remain relatively stable but cautioned that greater changes could occur after January 1. Brandon Phinx agreed that workforce and apprenticeship funding appeared to be moving toward a regional model. Commissioner Thomas had scheduled a call with local workforce board chairs, including Chairman Zobl and Chief Local Elected Official Bob Rial, to provide additional information.

Freda asked how the energy sector applied to Northern Middle Tennessee. Marla explained that the priority sectors reflected the state workforce plan and that energy primarily referred to nuclear energy. A new energy-related company had announced a facility spanning Sumner and Robertson counties with approximately 1,000 projected jobs, and another company was considering relocating its headquarters to Nashville. Marla said these developments suggested energy activity was expanding into Middle Tennessee.

Freda also asked about Sumner County enrollment and staffing. Marla reported that activity and enrollments were increasing. NM was exploring partnerships with Mid-Cumberland Human Resource Agency and the Department of Labor at the Sumner County facility. She expected those partnerships and customers shifting from Trousdale and Wilson counties to further increase activity.

**WorkSource Summit**
Marla reminded members that the WorkSource Summit would be held May 12 and 13. Approximately 70% of the board had registered. Because the summit coincided with the board's regularly scheduled May meeting, the meeting would not be held, and summit participation would serve as board professional development.

**Adjourn**
With no additional questions or business, Bo Callis made a motion to adjourn. Freda thanked the members for attending and adjourned the meeting.