

**Northern Middle TN Workforce Board Meeting  
February 10, 2021  
11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

<b>Present Members:</b>	<b>Members Absent:</b>	<b>Guest and Staff:</b>
Howard Bradley	Keith Carnahan	Marla Rye
John Alexander	James Harper	Renea Rosson
Jon Hunter	Tony Adams	George Phillips
Charles Story	Kristi Spurgeon	John Watz
Paul Webb	Dan Ryan	Christina Dusenberry
Mark Peed	Richie Brandon	Danielle Ellis
Seth Thurman	David Rutledge	Ellen Zinkiewicz
Carol Puryear		Meagan Dobbins
Bo Callis		Jane Hamrick
Dan Caldwell		James Starnes
Tylesha McCray		Ginger Fussell
Jennifer Hobbs		Andrea Dillard
GC Hixson		Renee Hollis
John Zobl		Freda Herndon
		Sherry Maynard
		Mayor Stephen Chambers
		Larry Mangrum
		Mayor Kerry R. McCarver
		Rob Dancer
		C Brown
		Mayor Robin Brandon
		Dr. Rubin Cockrell
		Ginger Hausser
		Casey Deel
		Aaron Wilson
		Ellen Gomez
		Susan Cowden
		Mayor Randall Hutto
		James Starnes
		Ankur Singla

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Development Board met virtually on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, at 11:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order, and Chairman John Zobl made opening remarks. Marla welcomed everyone to the meeting. John Zobl asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mark Peed made the motion to approve. GC Hixon seconded, and the vote was unanimous. Marla welcomed and thanked Mayors Chambers, McCarver, and Brandon for attending the meeting in support of the board. She then

thanked the board members at the February 2 Finance Committee meeting, John Alexander, those who assisted her with Paul Webb's virtual orientation, and Howard Bradley for visiting the American Job Center and talking with Marla about services.

Marla reported that during December, unemployment rates rose slightly, but Tennessee was number seven of the top ten lowest unemployment rates. The U.S. is at 6.7%, Tennessee is at 6.4%, and Northern Middle is at 5.3%. In Northern Middle, the lowest rate is Williamson County at 4.2%, and the highest rate is Houston County at 7.6%. Stewart and Montgomery Counties are at 6.8%. All other counties are at 5% or below. This leaves about 60,000 on the unemployment rolls in Northern Middle.

### **Workforce Study:**

Marla started by thanking those members who joined the virtual meeting through the Nashville Chamber of Commerce's Talent Solution forum on January 13. There are hyperlinks in the meeting materials to the workforce study presentation and the complete study. Marla reported that the workforce study reinforced the knowledge that healthcare, information technology, business services, corporate headquarters, and advanced manufacturing are at the top of our sector strategy as showing a lot of opportunities. The executive summary pointed out that many entry-level positions are subject to automation and may disappear, especially with the proposed minimum wage increase. This means we would need to do more to upskill and micro-credential those individuals that are entry-level. The study targeted five different groups and had action items for each group to include employers, the education system, the workforce system, policymakers, and leadership in our local communities and economic development. Marla encouraged those who are a part of this group to look at the workforce study and take action.

Marla reported the study pointed out that Tennessee has the need to offer digital literacy classes due to people having a lack of digital readiness. This is one of the areas EDSI is looking at as a point of action. The study also pointed out the disparity in earnings and education along with racial and ethnic backgrounds. Marla added that she had been asked to participate in a racial equity 2030 planning grant in conjunction with the Middle Tennessee Urban League. Finally, Marla expressed appreciation to the Nashville Chamber of Commerce for conducting the study.

### **Manage Board funds to support Career Pathways:**

Ginger reported that the quarter ended December 2020 was very strong from an expenditure standpoint. We exceeded what we utilized in quarter one by over half a million dollars. The increase related to additional funding received due to COVID-19. This funding was from an additional National Dislocated Worker grant, more funding under the existing disaster relief contract, and the CARES grant. In quarter one, \$3.4 million was spent, and in quarter two, \$3.9 million was spent for a total of \$7.4 million spent through December 2020. With a budget of \$15.1 million, we have utilized 44.7% halfway through the year. With \$2.5 million additional funding received, our budget figure for expenditures for this fiscal year is up to \$17.6 million. We have utilized 41.9%. Last week the Finance Committee approved the addition to the budget. The Dislocated Worker grant needs to be spent by June 30, 2022. With the money added to the 20-21 fiscal budget, it can be spent sooner than later if there is a need. Marla added that the Nashville School System is looking to partner with Workforce to hire sanitation & COVID monitors. Therefore, the spending of the budget money could increase.

Ginger reports that Mid-Cumberland has been the career provider for the last 18 months. Their contract was \$4.4 million million for the six month extension ending December 31, 2020, of which 82.5% was utilized. Quarter 2 declined by about \$88,000 compared to quarter 1, but increase slightly compared to the same quarter last year. Ginger extended appreciation to Mid-Cumberland for their service and activities. They will continue as the One-Stop-Operator. The previous One-Stop Operator contract was also extended for the six months ending December 31, 2020, and they utilized 30.3% of that six-month contract which was under what was budgeted due to some unfilled staff positions. Ginger said that Mid-Cumberland contributed to our minimum participant cost rate, which measures how many dollars go directly to participants. They had a strong month in September and were close to their target in October. As we move towards transition, the percentages decline. There were 557 in enrollment in the first quarter, but in quarter two, there were only 251. Ginger expressed concern that there will be lower dollar amounts in quarter three. The new providers are ramping up, and she believes they will work to make good things happen in quarter three despite the enrollment challenges.

Next, Ginger reported on Campbell Strong. Campbell Strong's project has been extended from two to three years. We've expended 77.2% of a \$7.7 million project. Enrollment has been expanded to a goal of 2000, with actual at 74.1% We've spent 80.8% of our direct participant budget through December. We have nine months remaining on the overall project.

Northern Middle's state measured minimum participant cost rate overall calculates at 44.87%. With additional grant activity (such as National Dislocated Worker and COVID-related grants) and a strong push with New Skills November, you'll see that our minimum participant cost rate is almost 60% spending \$4.1 million directly to participants.

Ginger then gave a monitoring report. Mid-Cumberland, the outgoing provider, has had some disallowed costs primarily related to youth, and she thinks the underlying driver of that is staff turnover and training. There have been many meetings during the transition period with both the outgoing provider and the incoming provider to ensure a smooth transition. We continue to monitor Campbell Strong expenditures. We have switched to a quarterly reporting basis with the state related to our monitoring.

Ginger was pleased to report that we have had our 2020 external audit completed, and John Zobl stated the audit was very good. Ankur Singla with Thurman Campbell group attended this meeting to give a summary of the audit. Anker started by expressing his appreciation for having the opportunity to work with Northern Middle and Workforce Essentials. He said that we had a great management team. Ankur then reviewed the auditor's report. Based on their audit of the financial statements, they provided an unmodified opinion which means all is well. The Yellow Book Report, which is for nonprofits and government entities, makes auditors understand the internal controls and compliance requirements. They understood the internal controls based on their audit, and they did not find any material or significant deficiencies. They did not find noncompliance with grant contracts, laws or regulations. A single audit report is required when an entity spends over \$750,000 in federal funding. The single audit has its compliance requirements. It was found that Northern Middle Workforce Board met all the federal compliance requirements. Overall, there were no findings reported and no questioned costs reported. Northern Middle is considered a low-risk auditee because Northern Middle has been audited

in the past few years, and there have been no findings and no material questions. When an entity meets those requirements, it can be considered a low-risk auditee which reduces the level of work auditors have to do. Charles Story congratulated all those who had a hand in this. He stated he had been on several boards and hasn't seen one that didn't have any findings at all. Ginger complimented Thurman Campbell for their hard work and patience through restructures, realignments, and changes. John Zobl gave accolades to everyone for their hard work.

Bo Callis asked Ginger about the disallowed expenses and if they were paid or will be recovered. Ginger assured him that Mid-Cumberland has always been responsive and quick to address any disallowed cost issue and would quickly reduce or refund the charges. This was done by reducing their billing in the final invoice.

John Zobl asked if we were thinking about or had a plan for carryover, and Ginger responded that carryover was factored into the 20-21 budget to allow for funds to be available into the first quarter of the next fiscal year.

Ginger then informed the board that we were under a three-year contract with Thurman Campbell. However, last week the Finance Committee agreed to extend their contract for one more year since they have done a great job and since we will also be monitoring new service providers. The Finance Committee approved the extension and accepted the financial report and the budget revision of the \$2.5 million.

Bo Callis moved to ratify the decision to extend the contract. Mark Peed seconded the motion. With no discussion, the board approved the motion.

**Connect People with Career Opportunities:**

George Phillips reports on the One-Stop-Operator dashboard. He first highlights the New Skills November, saying it was a very successful initiative. It offered upskilling options and short-term courses to individuals. In the partner program, as of December 31, the total Title One active cases were up to 1,936. The Adult Ed report shows an increase in the number of new employers that registered for jobs within Tennessee, indicating that there are a lot of jobs available. The Voc Rehab reports show that the AJCs had 24,478 visitors to the offices in the 13 counties. Last year the number of visitors was around 32,000. The lower number is due to the holidays and COVID. Davidson County has had the most significant drop in unemployment, going from 7.5% to 4.7%. In June, their unemployment was 12.1%, so that was a significant drop in the last six months. There are two new career service providers. One is EDSI, and MAC is providing the youth services in Davidson County.

Danielle Ellis reports that EDSI is enrolling new customers and working to instill best practices on identifying participants who are a great match for the services offered to ensure that they are being directed to the appropriate services. One strategy is to ensure the team understands the difference between eligibility versus suitability and redirect participants who may not be best suited for training right away but may also need additional services or job placement services. Team members are still being trained to use the systems, and EDSI anticipates the numbers will increase. At the close of the report, there were 22 enrollments, but at the close of business on Friday, there were 28, with 18 going

through the Q&A process. EDSI continues to get great feedback with regards to its quality assurance practices. The aim is to get 75% positive outcome. To improve the client experience EDSI has looked at the orientation session and figured out a way to streamline the process so that continuity is created in the messaging of the offered services. One orientation presentation has been created that is used across all the comprehensive sites so everyone who is facilitated in orientation is giving the same message. This way the same message is going to all participants across the counties.

Danielle explains that a workshop calendar has been distributed with topics clients need. It was found that many clients struggle with basic computer skills so a basic computer skills workshop will be offered as well as a resume series, digital footprint, and financial literacy plus others. The Step It Up to Thrive curriculum will be introduced to the youth participants. It helps to drive the growth mindset within young adults by covering four areas. The areas are called SPARK (what makes them feel excited), growth mindset as well as indicators of thriving and goal management. This platform is used to empower the youth participants and make great motivators and mentors of our youth advocates.

Next, Christina Dusenberry reports that EDSI is implementing the employer-driven model. Relationships in the area will be built with partners, employers, and participants. Connections will be built between them all as well as analyzing what is heard in the field and bringing that information to a place where they can be strategic and putting the right people with the right opportunities. They plan to be the first stop for both participants and employers to develop the workforce to a place where it also attracts new businesses who know they'll be responsive and more business will be attracted by word of mouth.

Danielle added that they had been actively working with state partners to develop some best practices as it relates to business development within the region. They recognize the great work the state has done and continue to engage employers. There is room for everyone to work collaboratively to serve employers in order to bridge the gap between employers and participants who are in need of a job.

Charles Story asked if they had an overall plan for marketing the services they provide to the area. Danielle explained that they do create their own marketing materials. They are working in collaboration with the state partners to see what is already being distributed and will then use the same language to spread their message. They are also building relationships with the employers to understand what their needs are and how they can assist them with the goal of having them as a repeat customer.

Ellen Zinkiewicz with MAC reported they are looking to integrate WIOA Youth Services in Davidson County with the resources that are already available through the Metro Action Commission. MAC is administering many of the Federal CARES dollars to provide rent relief and to help pay utilities. Not all young people are impacted by COVID but are struggling to pay rent because they are also trying to pay tuition, or their resources are pulled in many different directions. Within the first four weeks of operations, 13 referrals were fast-tracked to Headstart to get some young moms connected with free childcare resources. A fast-track process was developed so that young people can go to the head of the list for before or aftercare, enabling some participants to pursue their educational and work goals while having free ongoing childcare.

Ellen explains they have also been working on integrated partnerships with other community organizations serving Davidson County. MAC intends to be an intentional and thoughtful partner for organizations that serve young people and continue to put young people at the center to walk alongside that young person on the path they would choose. They want to be sure that the coaches for the young people have their best interests in mind.

Lastly, Ellen reports that they have been using a family-centered coaching model to train their staff. This puts the young person at the center while recognizing the young person is a parent, a student, and someone's child. The staff needs to realize that they may have a lot of providers at play and need to help bring together those providers to coordinate so that the young person can get the benefit of being engaged with multiple providers who will help them with the coordination and organization, so they don't have to do it on their own.

#### **Train Workforce to Fill Employer Needs:**

Andrea Dillard reports that we have gotten quite a bit of extra money with an additional grant that had to be spent in a very short period of time. The National Dislocated Worker grant is ongoing through June of 2022. Individuals are on a paid work experience with city and county governments assisting them and reopening their facilities, meeting the CDC requirements of sanitation and cleanliness. These jobs will last approximately six months and pay \$15-\$18. The objective is for the person to have secured full-time employment in the private or public sector by the time the temporary job has ended.

Andrea then went on to report about the CARES Act money. It was received in September and was to be expended by the end of December. We worked with 13 different employers and expended 98% of the funds. We have used more of our funds than any other area across the state. Andrea complimented those 13 employers for getting all of their documentation or training completed in a very short period of time.

Lastly, Andrea reported on the New Skills November. We worked with eight different local training providers to provide short-term training opportunities of all different types taking place in 10 of our 13 counties for individuals affected by COVID. We expended about 92%-95% of the funds that were allocated. One hundred forty-one workers were served. With incumbent workers, the total was close to 400. The CARES Act totaled about 600,000 hours. John Zobl commented that he knew of three employers in Sumner County that benefited from the CARES Act and said that it had a very meaningful impact on their business and each of them was appreciative.

#### **Improve Efficiency & Effectiveness of Training Programs:**

Renee Hollis reported that most of the programs did not meet their goals and that is due to COVID. Goals were set in January of 2020, and a pandemic was not expected. The goal for adult and dislocated workers was 1,524. We reached 987, which is nearly 65%. With our youth, we had a goal of 519. We reached 381, which is 73.4%. This year, some of the previously tracking programs have been removed, so there is a smaller group to work with. New lower goals were set for this year. The adult dislocated worker target is now 995, and youth is 403. Marla, the team, and the state all came together and set these goals. It is felt they are a little more reasonable, considering we are still in the middle of a pandemic. These new goals will be sent out to the contractors. Marla added that during KPI

negotiations, a lower percentage (13%) was set because they realized contractors would be new and getting up and running. Therefore, the second-quarter goal was set higher.

Freda Herndon reported that they have been working on cleaning up their Eligible Training Provider lists. We've gone from about 1,328 programs to less than 700. Any program that was not active and did not have any WIOA enrollments have been deactivated. Once the clean-up is finished, the federal monitoring will get started. Freda and John Watz will meet with providers to explain what will be required. ETPL will have consistent reporting. Now there is a more manageable list and a list that reflects our sector strategies. It will be more streamlined and manageable for our participants to navigate as well as for our partners. Freda asked for board approval on two programs. There was a TSU program that was an error and needed to be removed. There was a date discrepancy. A new program with Tennessee Professional Training Institute has submitted and gotten approval for a phlebotomy course. It is one of our sector strategies. This program has a bright outlook locally and nationally. Freda recommends approval from the board. GC Hixson moved to approve the motion. John Alexander seconded the motion. With no discussion, the board voted to approve the motion.

**Old Business:**

Marla Rye reported that an offender project dealing with Project Return out of Nashville had been mutually canceled due to COVID. The contract can be revisited at a later date. In addition, Voc Rehab has closed some centers and has allowed us to look at some of their furniture to possibly use, which will cut down on some costs. Marla Rye concluded the meeting by recognizing the mayors that joined the meeting and informing the next board meeting is May 12, 2021. With no other business, Howard Bradley moved to adjourn the meeting. Mark Peed seconded the motion. Chairman Zobl adjourned the meeting.