Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board
Innovations Committee
Meeting Minutes
August 4, 2026, via Zoom at 3:00 p.m.

APPROVED
NOV. 4, 2026

Members Attending	Members Absent	Staff & Guests Attending
Jim Hughes	Seth Thurman	Marla Rye
Kaitlin Salyer	Billy Givens	Andrea Dillard
Selittia Johnson	Anne Fugate	Meagan Dobbins
Kristi Spurgeon		Alyssa Spaulding
Nestor Reyes		Ginger Fussell
Tony Adams		

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Innovations Committee met via Zoom on August 4, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. With a quorum confirmed and Seth Thurman unable to attend, Kaitlin Salyer presided and requested a motion to approve the previous meeting's minutes. Nestor Reyes made the motion, and Kaitlin seconded. The committee proceeded to business reports. Marla welcomed new board members Jim Hughes of Williamson Health and Nestor of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. She asked staff to summarize routine reports to allow time to discuss federal waivers and proposed workforce governance changes.

Federal Performance

Andrea Dillard reported that Q4 federal performance met or exceeded all measures. Dislocated Worker Measurable Skill Gains, which had been below target when presented at the prior meeting, improved to passing before third-quarter results were finalized. Performance standards for the next two years had been negotiated, with six increased, six decreased, and three unchanged. Marla explained that performance at 100% or higher of the negotiated target was shown in green, while results of at least 90% were shown in yellow and also considered passing. As an example, the second-quarter employment-after-exit measure had an 85% target, a 76.5% passing threshold, and an actual result of 79.4%.

CSP Report

Meagan Dobbins reported that Q4 enrollment and closure activity improved significantly following a cautious start to in-house operations because of budget reductions. Annual enrollments totaled 1,079 against the state's goal of 1,108, achieving 97%. Staff completed 991 case closures, nearly matching new enrollments and supporting more manageable caseloads. Placement wages exceeded goals. Marla confirmed average hourly placement wages of $25.57 for Dislocated Workers, $16.73 for Youth, and $19.19 for Adults.

AJC Closure Update

Andrea reviewed service delivery following the board's decision to close eight designated AJCs in Cheatham, Houston, Humphreys, Robertson, Stewart, Trousdale, Wilson, and Williamson counties. Workforce Essentials-owned facilities in Cheatham, Robertson, and Williamson remained open as Workforce Essentials offices, with services continuing but overhead no longer supported by WIOA funds. The other five offices closed, and services moved to partner locations. Houston County provided space in the county 911 building in partnership with TCAT Dickson and its planned LPN class. Humphreys County services relocated to Nashville State Community College, Trousdale County provided courthouse space, Stewart County services used a senior citizens facility, and Wilson County partnered with TCAT in Lebanon. Andrea emphasized that services remained available in every county, including virtual options for customers unable to visit a location.

Youth Employment Program

Andrea reported that the Youth Employment Program served 302 participants against a goal of 272. A separate vocational rehabilitation allocation received around October served 28 participants against a goal of 32. The later award date and participants' ability to work fewer weekly hours contributed to unspent vocational rehabilitation funds. Both funding sources were renewed beginning July 1, with participants already enrolled.

Andrea highlighted CTE partnerships in Cheatham, Montgomery, Humphreys, Rutherford, and Stewart counties, including patient care and early teacher training opportunities. Meagan supported the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System's new CDL program through paid work experience for high school seniors and arranged paid internships for TCAT dental assisting students. Vocational rehabilitation partnerships included Project SEARCH hospital rotations in Clarksville, Lipscomb's IDEAL program, and Vanderbilt's Next Steps program, providing work experiences for students with disabilities. Staff planned to continue those partnerships.

Eligible Training Provider Requests

Andrea presented 11 new programs from existing approved providers: six from TCAT Murfreesboro, three from TCAT Hartsville, one from Nashville State Community College, and one from Austin Peay State University. All were offered by public institutions, led to credentials, and met Bright Outlook criteria. Most were 12 months or less, with one lasting 16 months. Marla explained that Austin Peay's Digital Court Reporting with Legal Transcription program had been added that week after a prospective participant contacted board members and staff worked with the school to obtain the submission.

Andrea also requested reinstatement of five TCAT Murfreesboro programs that had been removed after missing subsequent review deadlines. The lapse occurred during a vacancy in the position responsible for ETPL management, rather than because of poor performance. With a new staff member in place, the school requested that the programs return to the list. Kaitlin expressed support for restoring the Rutherford County programs. Andrea then added a late request from Excel Barber and Style College in Nashville after the provider completed its submission shortly before the meeting. The one-year barber training program cost $6K, led to a credential, and met national Bright Outlook criteria. Andrea explained that when training costs exceed the amount WIOA can provide, staff confirm a plan for the participant to cover the balance before enrollment. Jim made a motion to recommend approval of the 11 new programs, reinstatement of the five TCAT Murfreesboro programs, and addition of Excel Barber and Style College for final board consideration. Tony motioned and Nestor seconded. Jim asked where he could view the complete provider list. Marla said approved programs are available on the state ETPL and offered to send him the link. With no further discussion, the motion carried unanimously.

Employer Services

Marla reported an increase in Rapid Response activity. Natalie McLimore was assisting approximately 116 Stanley Black & Decker workers in Sumner County that day. Recent activity also involved an employer in Wilson County, and Shiloh in Dickson. Staff were working with affected individuals to support their return to employment. Materials included newly initiated incumbent worker training grants and SAEF-funded apprenticeship activity beginning in the new program year.

Marla reviewed the new Rural Healthcare grant supporting advancement to paramedic credentials. The initiative would expand from the prior Volunteer State partnership to include Austin Peay's new paramedic training program. Montgomery County EMS had established a paramedic apprenticeship program. Marla identified these efforts as a focus for the coming 12 months.

USDOL Waivers and Future of AJCs

Marla reviewed Tennessee's 13 federal WIOA waiver requests submitted in late April and the July 27 federal response. She highlighted flexibility in the requirement to spend 75% of Youth funding on out-of-school youth, supportive services for Adult and Dislocated Worker participants after exit, and employer-requested career readiness assessments without individual WIOA eligibility determinations. Other requests addressed statewide One-Stop Operator designation and the requirement for a comprehensive AJC in each local workforce area. Marla explained that some requests were approved, some involved authority already available under existing law, and a SNAP-related request could not be approved. She focused on the approved waiver allowing regional planning councils to perform local workforce board functions.

Marla explained that the proposed Workforce System Governance Framework would be considered by the State Workforce Development Board August 28 and, if approved, would have a September 1 effective date. The state board would establish governance standards and provide oversight, with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development administering the changes. Three regional workforce boards for East, Middle, and West Tennessee would assume local board responsibilities. The nine local workforce areas would remain. Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland would form a 40-county Middle Tennessee region governed by one regional board.

County mayors would continue interlocal agreements and appoint regional board members. Marla described eight members from each existing board as her expectation, not a finalized arrangement. She had been told rural counties would receive dedicated representation. Each local area would select a CLEO, and the three CLEOs would form a regional council responsible for designating the fiscal agent. Local advisory councils, potentially including groups such as Rutherford Works or TCAT advisory councils, would provide local input.

The regional board would select a lead administrative organization. Marla explained that the state recommended using the same organization as administrative entity and fiscal agent to reduce duplication and strengthen accountability. Although the policy would take effect in September if approved, she had been advised that operational changes were expected July 1, 2027. A possible single service provider for the region would require procurement beginning around January. She anticipated that current field operations would continue through June 30, with additional planning responsibilities during the transition. Marla noted that implementation procedures and timelines remained to be developed and that a new governor or changes in state board membership could affect the direction.

Jim asked whether the proposal was comparable to structures used in other states. Marla said some states had consolidated into a single workforce area and described Tennessee's proposal as an effort to reduce the number of providers and improve consistency in service delivery. She noted that Tennessee's size limited its ability to use a single statewide area under the existing framework.

Marla said she would distribute the proposed policy that afternoon while it remained open for public comment. She reminded members that the August 12 full board meeting would be held at Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville, with Commissioner Deniece Thomas scheduled to discuss the state's vision for the workforce system.

Adjourn

With no further business, a Kaitlin Salyer made a motion to adjourn and Nestor seconded. Kaitlin concluded the meeting.