

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board  
Meeting Minutes  
February 12, 2025, In-Person & via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.**

<b>Members Attending</b>	<b>Members Absent</b>	<b>Staff &amp; Guest Attending Cont.</b>
Anne Fugate	David Rutledge	Lydia Bennett-Carnes
Billy Givens	James Harper	Adam Lamb
Christopher West	Jordan Osborne	James Starnes
Corey Johns	Sellittia Johnson	Alyssa Ellis
Dan Caldwell	Kristi Spurgeon	Steve Gold
Freda Herndon	<b>Staff &amp; Guest Attending</b>	Patrick Buford
George "Bo" Callis	Marla Rye	Roe Falcone
Greg Jones	Andrea Dillard	Rob Dancer
John Zobl	Meagan Dobbins	Jacob Pease
Mark Peed	Ginger Fussell	James Roberson
Mary Lear	Alyssa Spaulding	Erin Hutchens
Nathan Garrett	Sarah Buckles	Laura Travis
Paul Webb	George Phillips	Ashley Crisp-Randle
Robin Baldree	Sheila Morris	Jasmine Jones
Selina Moore	Paul Hines	
Seth Thurman	Liz McLaughlin	
Shoshana Samuels	Katina Bass	
Tony Adams	Tanya Evrenson	
Kelly Tyler	Natalie McLimore	
<b>Mayors Attending</b>	Kerwin Thompson	
Mayor Rial	Heather Skelton	
Mayor Pograba	Kim Rye	
Mayor McCarver	Cathy Royals	
Lee Harrell (Proxy Mayor Golden)	Heidi Erpelding	
Mayor Anderson	Brittany Gray	

**Call Meeting to Order- Declaration of Quorum**

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Development Board met in person at the Montgomery County American Job Center with a virtual option on Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 11:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by John Zobl. Attendance was taken, and a quorum was declared. The Chairman then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mark Peed made the motion. Nathan Garrett seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Marla Rye thanked County Mayors and Board members for attending and provided updates. She introduced Selina Moore as the newest Board member, representing the TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development and replacing Ryan Jolley. The unemployment rate in the US is at 4.1%, Tennessee is at 3.6%, and Northern Middle is at 3%. It ranges between 2.6% and 5.2% in Northern Middle, with Houston County having the second-highest unemployment rate in Tennessee. The Labor Force Participation Rate in the US is 62.4%, while Tennessee's rate is 59.3%; however, the Northern

Middle region has a rate of 65.9%. The LFPR range is from 48.2% in Houston County to 78.6% in Trousdale County. The Governor gave the State of the State address on February 10th. There was approximately \$57M in various funding announced that would influence workforce development. \$7M of it has been proposed for the Tennessee Youth Employment program to continue this year. \$25 million of it will go towards fast-tracking economic and workforce development, and \$6.3 million will be allocated to microcredentialing to support workforce development and address high-skills and industry clusters in the state. She is most interested in learning about the Tennessee Works program, which was awarded \$5 million and will be another partnership between economic development and the TDLWD.

### **Tech Impact**

Marla introduced Sheila Morris and Heidi Welch from Tech Impact to discuss their IT Works program, launching in Nashville. They are seeking inclusion on the ETPL. Sheila Morris, Program Director, explained that IT Works supports disconnected young adults by providing technical training, certification, mentorship, and internships for entry-level IT careers. The 16-week program includes 11 weeks of instruction and a 5-week paid internship. Graduates earn Cisco IT Essentials certification and take the CompTIA+ exam. Heidi Welch, Chief Program Officer, noted that each cohort has 16–18 students, with two cohorts per year in Nashville. 90% graduate, and 70% secure IT jobs within six months. The program is tuition-free, funded by Tech Impact, with a \$12K cost per student plus \$2,160 for internships. Nashville operations have begun, but student recruitment awaits THEC approval. She thanked Marla and Northern Middle for their support.

Sheila Morris then opened the floor to questions. John Zobl asked if both cohorts would run this year. Heidi responded that, pending THEC approval, recruitment could begin within 1.5–2 months, with the hope of launching the first cohort before the end of the fiscal year. John Zobl then asked about marketing. Sheila shared that most students join through word of mouth, social media, and partnerships. Heidi added that they allocate \$3K monthly to digital marketing but rely heavily on nonprofit collaborations. Shoshana Samuels asked about eligibility for justice-involved or foster youth. Heidi confirmed they are welcome but must disclose their status for internship placement. Tech Impact also offers resources for record expungement. Shoshana offered to connect them with additional Nashville organizations. Corey Johns inquired about registered apprenticeships. Heidi said they are registered in Pennsylvania and Delaware, but have seen limited success in IT. They would consider it if employer interest increases, but are not currently pursuing it.

### **OSO Report**

George Phillips delivered the One-Stop Operator report. All three pilot projects are now operational. The Nashville AJC was relocated from Mainstream Drive to Elm Hill Pike at the Nashville State Community College East Davidson Campus. He thanked Natalie McLimore and Kerwin Thompson for their coordination of the move. Adult Title I enrollments were down compared to Q1, but up for Youth. For Adult Education, the number of HiSet participants doubled, and those who received a level gain tripled compared to Q1. Wagner Peyser's statistics are down, particularly in the new job orders in Jobs4TN. He believes this is due to the holidays. The traffic count decreased from 23,000 to 18,000 across all 13 counties. Most of the traffic loss was from December, so he believes this can also be attributed to the holidays. Unemployment rates are either down or flat in 11 counties. Humphreys and Rutherford County's unemployment went up by 0.01%. Staffing remains a challenge for TDLWD. Previously, there was one team lead per comprehensive center; however, now two leads cover four counties. The state has released a new KPI, Wagener Peyser co-enrollments with Title I. The target goal is 70%, and NM achieved 44% in Q2.



## **CSP Performance**

Meagan Dobbins reported on CSP performance. MAC met nearly all Q1 goals but only one in Q2, which was expected due to holiday slowdowns. MAC staff have a plan to improve. Tanya Evrenson (MAC) explained their focus on in-school youth (ISY), who were unreachable during the holidays. They ended Q2 short by two ISY and three out-of-school youth (OSY) but caught up in January with 14 OSY and 9 ISY enrollments. Marla Rye inquired about MPCR; Tanya noted that, since they focus on ISY, funds are allocated to incentives rather than training, so expenditures will increase as students graduate. Follow-ups with employed youth are a priority. At 50% of the program year, MAC met or exceeded mid-year goals in all categories except OSY, which is at 48.3%. Meagan expects them to meet annual targets.

EDSI has exceeded adult, dislocated worker (A/DW), and youth enrollment goals. The only concern was exits, but steps are in place to manage them. Caseloads in NM remain high, but efforts to reduce them are underway. Overall, EDSI's exits slightly exceed the 50% target, so Meagan is not concerned about missing the quarterly goal. Liz McLaughlin (EDSI) discussed MPCR strategies. In July, they capped tuition to avoid overspending but later increased it from \$2,500 to \$3,500, adding \$36K in monthly expenditures. In December, they raised the supportive services cap to \$4,000, increasing January spending by \$54K. EDSI also launched adult paid work experience in January and expanded outreach, including support for veterans and military spouses at Fort Campbell. MPCR trends have improved since these changes, with further growth expected in February.

Meagan Dobbins proceeded to review the performance of the three pilot projects. In Clarksville, the NM board is acting as the CSP for all services and has met or exceeded all goals except for youth enrollments, which they narrowly missed. In Sumner, where the state is acting as the CSP for all services, none of the enrollment goals have been met. The primary challenge has been that the staff are new to Title I, which is difficult to learn quickly. NM staff have scheduled a meeting with the state team to develop a plan for improving enrollment, exits, and case management. Marla clarified that this pilot project was designed to determine whether aligning staff under a single agency would create a more cohesive team. However, during the planning phase, three state staff members were designated to lead the effort, but one left, one retired, and one was reassigned, resulting in a restructuring of both leadership and staff. In Nashville, the AJC relocated to Elm Hill Pike at NSCC and has focused on direct community outreach by setting up mobile "AJC in a Box" stations at community centers. In their first quarter at the new location, they saw 258 additional visitors, bringing the total to 4,199 individuals—an increase of 952 from the previous year's 3,247 during the same quarter. Corey Johns asked when the new location officially opened, and Natalie McLimore confirmed that the opening date was December 16, 2024. Nathan Garrett commented that, from TCAT's perspective, having an AJC staff member on campus has been invaluable, as students have been able to learn about programs they otherwise would not have known about.

Shoshana Samuels inquired about the strong placement wages and asked what was driving the increase. Meagan Dobbins explained that the goal for adult and dislocated worker wages is \$16.50 per hour, while for youth, it is \$13 per hour. She attributed the wage performance for adults and dislocated workers to the fact that these participants typically achieve degrees or credentials. John Zobl then asked Natalie McLimore to elaborate on Nashville's success. She emphasized that one of the most significant outcomes of the pilot program has been the collaboration among all partners in the building. She noted that it took everyone's cooperation to complete the transition as quickly as they did and thanked Paul Hines and George Phillips for their contributions. Marla added that with the new location, Adult Education is now fully integrated with the AJC.



### **Federal Performance**

Meagan Dobbins then delivered the Federal Performance Report, noting that the final numbers had slightly improved since the Committee meeting. While it was initially predicted that the youth employment rate after exit would fail in Q2, the final report showed that NM surpassed the 90% goal of 78.8%, reaching 81%, which is considered passing. However, three measures are projected to fail in the third quarter. Meagan expressed her commitment to making the necessary adjustments to bring those numbers up to at least the 90% passing threshold, but acknowledged that the state's significant increase in performance goals has made it challenging.

Marla Rye asked how many workforce areas were meeting at 90% or better in the new report cards. Meagan responded that only the NM and Upper Cumberland regions met all goals, while the other seven areas failed in at least one category. Corey Johns then inquired about the definition of a Measurable Skills Gain (MSG). Meagan explained that MSG is the only real-time measure and applies to everyone in the training cohort from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. A qualifying MSG can include a certification of completion, a transcript, or grades from instructors—anything that demonstrates an incremental improvement in skills rather than the attainment of a final credential.

### **Eligible Training Provider List**

Andrea Dillard delivered the ETPL Report. Tech Impact and CVRS Academy of Beauty had requested to become providers. Tech Impact, if approved, would not be officially added to the ETPL list until it receives THEC approval. Andrea explained that while Tech Impact began its application in November 2024, THEC approvals typically take three to six months as they cover the entire state of Tennessee. Twelve new programs have requested approval: one from Tech Impact, seven from CVRS, and others from Austin Peay (CDL Training), TCAT Nashville (Computer Operating Systems and Electrical programs), and Volunteer State Community College (Human Resource Professional program). All twelve programs lead to a credential. Additionally, two programs requested reapproval. Motlow State had a Medical Office Concentration program that fell off the ETPL due to a missed renewal deadline. Seth Thurman noted that the Innovation Committee recommended approving all programs, including a conditional approval for Tech Impact pending THEC approval. He made a motion to follow the committee's recommendation, seconded by Mark Peed. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Andrea then reviewed the ETPL Truck Driving Schools' performance. At the last Board meeting, Tennessee CDL School requested reinstatement after being suspended in November 2023 for failing performance measures. The Board requested more information before reinstating, so Andrea met with Sean Davis, the school's owner and director, to understand the steps taken to improve performance. She reviewed the 31 students enrolled at the time of their removal and found that the credential rate had risen to 67% and the placement rate to 64%, both exceeding the 60% goal. Sean Davis sent a letter to the Board, acknowledging their concerns and detailing measures to improve pass rates and student outcomes. He reduced the CDL testing wait time from six to eight weeks down to one to two weeks and is in the process of becoming a state-approved CDL testing site, which would further shorten wait times. Additionally, he purchased a Class B vehicle to help students who fail the CDL obtain at least a Class B license, opening more career opportunities. Andrea noted that at least one of the 31 students had earned their Class B and now works for Metro Schools as a bus driver. She added that administrative efforts had improved test date tracking, reducing reporting delays. Andrea believed Sean Davis and his team had addressed the Board's concerns and understood why they were removed. John Zobl asked about the target rates, and Andrea confirmed that NM's goal is 60%, while the state goal is 40%. Seth Thurman stated that the Innovation Committee recommended reinstating Tennessee CDL School and made a motion to approve. Mark Peed seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Andrea then reviewed 160 Truck Driving Academy, which was also removed from the ETPL in November 2023 for failing to meet performance standards. Their credential rate at the time was 28%, and their placement rate was 33%. They appealed and were reinstated under a one-year probation period. In November 2024, Andrea reassessed their performance and found that the credential rate had increased to 39% and the placement rate to 60%. Mark Peed asked whether the 60% placement rate was based on all enrolled students or only those who had earned credentials. Andrea clarified that it included all enrolled students, meaning someone who dropped out could still be counted if they found employment in any field. Freda Herndon asked for the Committee's recommendation. Seth Thurman responded that the Innovation Committee had decided to present the issue to the full Board without making a recommendation.

Steve Gold, the owner and director of 160 Truck Driving Academy, attended the meeting virtually. Chairman Zobl invited him to speak. Steve Gold stated that 160 Driving Academy is the largest commercial truck driving school in the nation, having trained over 32,000 individuals. He emphasized that his program prioritizes safety and credentialing, which means they set high expectations for students. He attributed the issues at the Nashville branch to local leadership, which has since been addressed with staffing changes. He pointed out that since July 1, 2025, 13 students had enrolled in WIOA; seven graduated, five were still enrolled, and one dropped out due to a positive drug screen. He asserted that most dropouts at the Nashville branch resulted from failed drug tests, which they are legally required to conduct. He proposed a solution to the NM staff: WIOA would not be charged for students until they complete the first 40 hours, pass the drug screen, and begin behind-the-wheel training. He requested to remain on the ETPL, stating that the program was now on the right track with improved local leadership. Chairman Zobl thanked him for his remarks.

Seth Thurman reiterated that the Innovation Committee had brought the issue to the entire Board because of the previous appeal circumstances. Marla Rye stated that Board policy requires providers to meet a 60% performance threshold for both credentialing and placement, which 160 Truck Driving Academy had not achieved. Mark Peed pointed out that 160 had been given a warning 15 months ago, and while progress had been made, they were still below the standard. Steve Gold interjected that if the Board looked at the numbers since July 1, his team had made significant progress. Greg Jones questioned why only the Nashville branch faced leadership and drug-related issues, given that the company had trained 32,000 drivers nationwide. Steve Gold admitted he was unsure why Nashville had struggled, but reiterated that they maintained 650 WIOA partnerships across the country. Greg Jones stated that for those of the Board who work in the private sector, it's all about performance, and the performance is still not there.

Mark Peed asked if 160 would be eligible to reapply in 12 months with updated data. Marla confirmed and added that there was also an appeal process at the state level. She noted that 160 would not be the first school to be removed and later reinstated. Mark Peed referenced Tennessee CDL School, which had successfully improved its performance after being removed. He then asked if WIOA enrollment rules could be modified so that students would not be enrolled until they were further into the program. Marla was unsure, as the AJC is required to enroll students in WIOA before they begin training. Steve Gold reiterated that he was being held accountable for students who failed drug tests, and Mark Peed questioned why drug testing was not conducted before training started. Steve explained that federal regulations require the DOT drug screen to be administered immediately before students receive their permit.

Chairman Zobl stated that, for consistency, he agreed with Greg Jones that 160's performance was not yet meeting expectations. He recommended suspending 160 Driving Academy and allowing them to reapply in a year with stronger results. Seth Thurman made a motion to accept this recommendation,



and Mark Peed seconded. Mark Peed also suggested that the school work on modifying its enrollment process to ensure students are tested before WIOA funds are used. Steve Gold noted that about half of the WIOA offices he works with already implement such a policy. Marla expressed interest in reviewing their process. With no further discussion, the motion to suspend 160 Driving Academy was passed unanimously.

### **Financial Report**

Marla delivered an abbreviated version of the Financial Report prepared by Ginger Fussell, who was unable to attend due to a death in the family. She reported that Q2 expenditures totaled \$2 million, reflecting a \$98K decrease from Q1. However, formula spending had increased by \$323,000, but the Summer Youth Program saw a significant decrease of \$395,000. Total expenditures for the fiscal year to date stand at \$4.3 million, representing 32% of the projected 50% increase. Staff have been directed to allocate more funds directly to participants. Marla reminded the Board that grants have a two-year spending window, and neither she nor Ginger anticipates any issue fully expending the remaining funds that expire on June 30, 2025.

Maintaining the Minimum Participant Cost Rate (MPCR) remains a challenge. The overall MPCR has risen to 28.54% from Q1's 23.43%, but it still falls short of the 40% goal. Marla acknowledged the efforts of EDSI and MAC in improving this rate but noted that more progress is needed. A proposed revision to the state MPCR policy is set to be presented to the State Workforce Board on February 28. If passed, it would allow Summer Youth expenditures to count toward the MPCR, which would bring the current rate up to 36%. Marla also plans to advocate for the inclusion of incumbent worker training in the policy revision, arguing that these funds directly benefit participants through their employers. Weekly meetings with the state continue to address performance benchmarks for Sumner County and Nashville, while biweekly meetings with EDSI and MAC monitor overall progress.

Marla shared that PAR had completed its official monitoring report with no findings, and the independent audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, conducted by Stone, Rudolph & Henry, also resulted in no findings and an unmodified opinion, which is the best possible outcome. As a result, NM will qualify as a low-risk auditee, a designation that will be appreciated by the fiscal team. The Finance Committee approved two action items. The first was an amendment to the 2024-2025 budget to incorporate an additional \$119,000 from the Rural Healthcare Grant, bringing the total budget to \$13.2 million. The second was a request for flexibility to repurpose \$1 million in Dislocated Worker funding for Adult programs. Marla clarified that this flexibility may not be necessary, especially given the current influx of layoffs, but noted that a significant amount of Dislocated Worker funding remains available. Mark Peed made a motion to approve both action items, which was seconded by Seth Thurman. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Before concluding, Marla took a moment to acknowledge Ginger Fussell's dedication and hard work, particularly during the audit process. Chairman Zobl also commended Ginger and her team for successfully navigating the audit, especially given that a new firm conducted it. Shoshana Samuels requested that the Board extend its condolences to Ginger and express their appreciation for her efforts.

### **Rapid Response**

Natalie McLimore reported that 415 employees have been affected by layoffs, with the most significant response being at Bargain Hunt. Over the course of 2024, a total of 1,464 employees have been laid off in the region. Once a WARN notice is submitted, her team works closely with employers to provide information about unemployment benefits and AJC services. She expressed gratitude to the State and





EDSI for their efforts in making rapid response initiatives effective. Looking ahead, the most significant upcoming layoff will occur at Bridgestone at the end of July, affecting 900 employees.

### **IWT and Apprenticeship Programs**

Andrea Dillard then reviewed grant funding opportunities available to employers. The Board has allocated \$300,000 from its regular budget for incumbent worker training, and all of these funds have already been committed. While it may appear that the budget is overdrawn, Andrea clarified that two employers have completed their training under budget and have not yet submitted their final billing. The State Apprenticeship Grant currently has \$7,500 remaining, with funding distributed across 10 of the 13 counties. So far, 32 employers have received contracts through the grant.

### **Procurement Update**

Marla provided an update on procurement, explaining that state procurement guidelines require a new procurement process every five years. The current CSPs' contracts are set for 4.5 years, and she intends to engage with County Mayors and Chambers of Commerce to understand their specific needs and desired service adjustments. The goal is to develop a customized approach for each county. The Board will award new contracts by the May Board meeting to facilitate a smooth transition prior to the July 1, 2025, implementation.

### **Public Comment**

There were no requests for public comment.

### **Adjourn**

Without further discussion, Chairman Zobl reminded the board of their next meeting, scheduled for May 14, 2025. The meeting was adjourned.

