



# Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

APPROVED  
August 13, 2025

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board  
Meeting Minutes  
May 14, 2025, In-Person & via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.**

Members Attending	Members Absent	Staff & Guest Attending Cont.
Billy Givens	Anne Fugate	Marla Rye
Christopher West	David Rutledge	Andrea Dillard
Corey Johns	James Harper	Ginger Fussell
Dan Caldwell	John Zobl	Meagan Dobbins
Freda Herndon	Jordan Osborne	Alyssa Spaulding
George Callis	Kelly Tyler	Samantha Roberts
Greg Jones	Robin Baldree	George Phillips
Kristi Spurgeon	Sellittia Johnson	Liz McLaughlin
Mark Peed		Brandon Phinx
Mary Lear		Katina Bass
Nathan Garrett		Betsy Foster
Paul Webb		Tanya Evrenson
Selina Moore		Mayor Isbell
Seth Thurman		Mayor Pogreba
Shoshana Samuels		Amy Maberry
Tony Adams		Sarah Buckles
		Matt Spinella

## Call Meeting to Order- Declaration of Quorum

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board met in person at TCAT Smyrna with a virtual option on Wednesday, May 14, 2025, at 11:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Acting Chairman and Finance Committee Chair, Mark Peed. Attendance was taken, and a quorum was declared. The Chairman then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Sho Samuels made the motion, and Dan Caldwell seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Marla opened with appreciation for the attendees, and shared that this meeting would be the final one for Chris West (NHC Healthcare) and Greg Jones (Rutherford County Chamber) who were retiring. She thanked them for their service. Marla then provided a federal update, noting the release of President Trump's FY26 "skinny" budget on May 2, 2025, which proposes a nearly 35% cut to the U.S. Department of Labor's budget. The Job Corps program would be eliminated, and many federal workforce programs would be consolidated under a new "Make America Skilled Again" initiative. Locally impactful eliminations include the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) and the Adult Education program, totaling a potential \$4 million in cuts to Northern Middle's workforce funding. Head Start faces a \$12.3 million cut, and Job Corps faces \$13.3 billion cut nationally. Despite these reductions, local economic indicators remain strong. The labor force participation rate in Northern Middle averages 67.7%, outperforming both the national average (62.5%) and the state average (59.9%). Trousdale leads the NM region at 76.3%, while Stewart has the lowest rate at 51.7%. Regional unemployment remains

low, at 3%, with rates ranging from 2.4% in Williamson, the lowest in Tennessee, to 3.9% in Houston. Seven of the ten counties with the lowest unemployment statewide are located in Northern Middle, primarily clustered around the Nashville metro area.

Marla then reported significant activity and funding influxes, including a last-minute \$500K opportunity from the state to be spent on the Youth Employment Program before the end of June. Staff are working rapidly to deploy funds, alongside efforts on re-entry programs, staffing adjustments, and enhanced training.

### **Work-Based Learning Innovation**

Marla welcomed guest speaker Matthew Spinella, Director of Workforce Partnerships at the Tennessee Department of Education, to share innovations in work-based learning as the Board explores industry-aligned youth employment opportunities. Matt Spinella gave a detailed presentation on the state's work-based learning (WBL) efforts, which support both in-school and out-of-school youth through structured, legal, and high-quality workforce experiences. He described how students gain industry exposure in fields such as manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and retail, often earning certifications and wages while still in high school. Spinella emphasized that the documentation has been streamlined into three concise forms that will provide the necessary legal protections for employers who host students. He also noted that Youth Employment Program and OJT funds can help businesses offset costs associated with hiring and training youth workers.

Mary Lear asked about how to get involved, and Spinella confirmed he is the primary contact and can provide employers with materials and guidance. He also clarified that WBL is available statewide and supported by labor standards specialists in each region. Marla Rye acknowledged Amy Mayberry's presence on the call and emphasized the state's cross-agency commitment to expanding WBL. She noted that Spinella would be speaking to all nine local workforce boards to raise awareness. Dan Caldwell shared that Nissan is bringing on 64 summer interns in Northern Middle, with hopes that many will transition to full-time roles, one of the company's key performance indicators. Spinella closed by thanking the board and encouraging members to help spread the word.

### **OSO Report**

George Phillips delivered the One-Stop Operator report, highlighting key performance trends as of March 31. He noted that while the rollout of pilot programs and AJC relocations has begun to stabilize, activity across Northern Middle remains high, with the Nashville AJC experiencing a notable surge in foot traffic since its December move. Title I enrollment MPCR rose to 42.22%, and Wagner-Peyser participation increased by over 20%. While job orders and new employers were flat, total foot traffic grew by 10% over the previous quarter, with Sumner County making a strong recovery.

He confirmed that unemployment rates decreased in every county except Humphreys, which held steady. George Phillips acknowledged ongoing staffing challenges across partner agencies and noted that he anticipates it to continue leading up to the CSP changeover. He concluded by reporting that Title I and Wagner-Peyser enrollments are on target, the new state KPI for co-enrollments is above 50% for April, and 73 individuals were placed into jobs through Wagner-Peyser services during the quarter.

### **Federal Performance – Contractor Performance**

Meagan Dobbins presented the federal performance update, noting that all measures except measurable skills gain (MSG) are exit-based and reflect cohorts from up to two years prior. She reported strong results for Q3, with the region meeting at least 90% of all federal performance goals. While three measures had been projected to fail, efforts to raise them were successful. Only one measure, youth MSG, is predicted to fall short in Q4, but Meagan expressed no concern given its real-time nature and the opportunity to improve it before year-end. She then reviewed contractor performance for the

quarter ending March 31. MAC met their enrollment goals and, although behind on closures for the quarter, is on track to meet its cumulative targets by June 30. EDSI exceeded quarterly enrollment goals and, following new closure procedures, increased exits by more than 50%. Cumulative performance is strong, and Meagan anticipates that all goals will be met. She also reviewed the board-managed Clarksville pilot, which has met all Q3 goals except for youth enrollment, which was only two short of the target. She expects that the goal will be met by June 30. In contrast, the state-managed Gallatin site lags in youth enrollment and exits, though A/DW goals were met. Staff are actively working to clean up caseloads and improve performance. Marla added that the pilot projects have provided valuable insight into effective AJC operations, positioning the region for a stronger model beginning July 1.

### **Eligible Training Provider List**

Andrea Dillard provided an update on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Tech Impact's IT Works program, previously approved contingent upon THEC approval, has now received full approval and is officially on the ETPL. Two new providers, Professional Driving Academy and Pivot Technology School, both based in Nashville and approved by THEC, have applied to be added to the ETPL. Each submitted new programs for consideration: Professional Driving Academy requested approval for its CDL Class A and B programs; Pivot Technology requested approval for cybersecurity, data analytics, and software development programs. It was noted that for Pivot Technology, only the cybersecurity program results in a credential; the other two do not meet credentialing requirements. Other program additions came from state institutions, including Volunteer State, MTSU, and TCAT campuses. All of these meet credential standards, including a newly submitted Flooring Installation program from TCAT Dickson-Clarksville, which the Certified Flooring Installers Association recognizes.

Two reinstatements were also presented: Motlow State's Paramedic program, which had expired due to missed renewal, and Austin Peay's Human Resource Professional program, which requires reapproval due to a tuition increase exceeding 25%. The Innovations Committee recommended approving all submissions except the two Pivot programs that lack credentials. Discussion followed. Shoshana Samuels, Selina Moore, and Freda Herndon questioned whether Pivot's Data Analytics and Software Development programs could be approved contingent upon identifying a credential. Marla suggested that the board take action to approve all other programs while working with Pivot to determine if a microcredential could be embedded. Mark Peed expressed concern about approving a course that was portion of a larger program. Samuels reiterated support for the programs, agreeing with Marla's conditional approval if a credential could be identified. Greg Jones agreed, noting the importance of credentialing. Marla then asked Andrea if staff had specifically asked Pivot about credentialing for those programs. Andrea confirmed that they have, adding that they only provide a certificate of completion, not an industry-recognized credential. Freda Herndon then moved to accept the committee's original recommendation to approve all programs except the two uncredentialed Pivot programs, and the board could reconsider them if a credential is embedded. Tony Adams seconded. The motion passed without further discussion.

Andrea also provided an update on employer grants. All funds have been obligated for the Employer Initiatives Grant, supporting training for 430 employees across 18 employers. The State Apprenticeship Grant has funded training for 70 apprentices through nine employers, and the Apprenticeship Training Grants are supporting 45 apprentices through four to five additional employers. Marla Rye added that TCAT Dickson's new CDL program costs slightly over \$2K, significantly less than comparable private programs. While the program is longer, it will be a competency-based model. This cost difference could double participant enrollment over higher cost training. She also noted that 160 Driving Academy did not appeal its removal from the ETPL and remains off the list.

## **Financial Report**

Ginger Fussell presented the financial update for the third quarter of the fiscal year, reporting \$7.2 M in expenditures to date. She noted that this was a much-needed strong quarter, with \$2.9M in grant funding utilized, matching last year's quarterly average. However, this year's overall average is slightly lower at \$2.4M due to reduced funding. Ginger explained that most of the quarter's increase was in the core Adult/DW and Youth programs. At 75% time progression through the fiscal year, the highest fund stream, Adult/DW, was only at 69%. She emphasized that while the spending pace is behind, it allows for more carryover into the following year, which will help offset anticipated reductions. Importantly, all expiring formula grant funds have been fully utilized.

Additionally, Ginger reported a \$494K mid-year allocation for the Tennessee Youth program, which must be spent by June 30. She also introduced a new PROWD grant aimed at reentry services for individuals leaving federal prison. The grant adds \$20K to this year's budget and continues through 2027. Marla Rye elaborated that the grant will fund a career advisor role and provide skills training in coordination with the halfway house in downtown Nashville. Freda Herndon inquired about the location, and Marla confirmed it was the federal halfway house. Ginger reminded the Board that they had previously approved the flexibility to repurpose up to \$1M in Dislocated Worker funding for Adult services. A request for \$750K of that amount was submitted and approved by the state, though it may not be needed this year. The Minimum Participant Cost Rate (MPCR) rose significantly to 42.22% this quarter, up from 28.54%. This improvement was due to both increased contractor performance and a revised state policy that allowed previously excluded expenditures, including TYEP and Rural Health Apprenticeship grants, to count toward MPCR. Without the policy change, the MPCR would have been 36.24%.

She noted that Career Service Provider (CSP) billings increased by \$564K, reminding that EDSI billed for two fewer locations due to pilot projects. With just three months left in a 54-month contract, Ginger expressed appreciation for both EDSI and MAC for continuing to enroll participants and support the transition to the new program year. She directed the board to pages 32–34 in their packets for detailed CSP performance data, calculated using the old MPCR policy. Regarding pilot projects, she noted significant improvement in Montgomery County and some progress in Sumner County, though utilization could have been better. She also gave a monitoring update, sharing that with fewer external reviews this quarter, internal monitoring has increased and will continue. The area recently received an onsite visit from the Office of Transformation at the TDLWD, which resulted in no findings and two best practice recognitions—one for the training manual developed by Megan and one for the use of SCSEP workers in American Job Centers. Additionally, a review of the Title I case file resulted in no findings.

She reminded the board that over the past three years, the area has experienced a 23% net reduction in funding, with another 13% cut expected for the upcoming program year. On pages 42–43, she presented a preliminary 2025–2026 budget of \$11.4M, based on confirmed formula allocations totaling \$7.2M and projected carryover. This includes funding from Tennessee Youth, the Rural Health grant, and the Tennessee Proud reentry grant. The Board was asked to approve two action items: an amended current-year budget of \$13.7M (an increase of \$514K) and the preliminary 2025–2026 budget. Nathan Garret made a motion and Selina Moore seconded, and both budgets were unanimously approved. Board members expressed their appreciation for the team's work.

## **AJC Operations**

Marla began her update by noting that they have applied for a new \$1M YEP grant, although the amount may be reduced due to high demand, and a decision is expected soon. The change from \$13M to \$11M in the program budget is largely due to a decrease in allocation and changes in youth program funding. She also highlighted the Rural Healthcare Grant, which is providing training for 24 EMTs in five

counties to become paramedics. Orientation has begun, and training will start the following week. All associated costs for these county governments and EMTs are covered to improve the retention of paramedics at the local level.

Marla then outlined significant changes taking effect July 1 related to American Job Center (AJC) operations. Due to a procurement policy change by the State Workforce Board on February 28, 2025, local boards can now apply to serve as their career service providers. In response, the Executive Committee unanimously voted on March 11 to pursue this option. A formal request was submitted to the state on March 24, and conditional approval was granted on April 2. To address potential conflicts of interest, particularly regarding self-monitoring, they plan to subcontract monitoring duties to an independent entity. Full approval was granted following the submission of their firewall mitigation plan on April 11. Natalie McLimore, who previously led TANF programs across 60 counties, will lead the Career Service Provider operations, maintaining separation from the board's governance functions. Transitions for current staff are underway, with Workforce Essentials (WEI) honoring prior service from EDSI and MAC staff and working to waive the standard waiting period for healthcare enrollment. Due to funding constraints, nine positions, including four management roles, are being eliminated. Job offers have been extended to selected staff, and training for new processes has already begun.

Marla provided a comprehensive data analysis of the 13 AJCs in the region, ranking them on cost, activity levels, efficiency, and service reach. Rutherford County consistently ranked highest while Trousdale and Williamson Counties ranked lowest. Shoshana Samuels asked what made Rutherford County stand out, and Marla explained that a tenant, Yates Staffing, helps offset costs and also drives traffic. Mark Peed emphasized that the analysis should not only consider the cost per visit or efficiency, but also community needs, particularly in counties with high unemployment rates. He pointed out that smaller counties may exhibit higher traffic levels because residents are in greater need of employment, suggesting that the AJC presence should remain tied to need, not just numbers. Freda Herndon added that adult education programs, such as those present in Dickson County, may be contributing to increased traffic and should be noted in any analysis. Marla confirmed this, noting that Dickson's high numbers are partially due to adult ed co-location, and that other counties like Williamson may benefit from similar partnerships. Mark Peed also proposed that decisions about downsizing should factor in whether a center's high traffic is tied to co-located partners or employers that draw community members into the center. He cautioned against prematurely closing centers without a thorough understanding of these external drivers. Greg Jones echoed this sentiment, commending the thorough analysis and encouraging creative solutions to cost concerns before making closures.

Mayor Pogreba inquired whether unemployment rates were taken into account in the ranking. Marla responded that while the rankings focused on activity and cost, they did analyze unemployment rates separately. She confirmed that Montgomery, Stewart, Houston, and Humphreys Counties have the highest unemployment rates and lowest labor force participation, indicating a greater need. Shoshana Samuels emphasized the need for fixed, accessible service points rather than rotating locations in rural areas, noting that residents need consistent, predictable access. Marla agreed, citing difficulties with signage and visibility if services are dispersed between libraries or courthouses on varying days. The group discussed alternative service models, including virtual support. Greg Jones and Shoshana Samuels recommended expanding the use of chat functions on the website to offer real-time support. Selina Moore pointed out that while many people prefer digital communication, rural counties often lack reliable broadband and transportation, necessitating both online and in-person access. Shoshana Samuels and Freda Herndon encouraged more direct engagement with local chambers and economic development leaders to enhance visibility and community integration. Marla noted that AJC staff are already members of all chambers, although attendance can be inconsistent due to staffing constraints. In closing, Mark Peed suggested maintaining the current structure and reviewing center performance

again in six months, once the transition to internal service delivery has matured. He recommended engaging county mayors now to explore co-location opportunities and alternative facility solutions.

**Public Comment**

There were no requests for public comment.

**Adjourn**

Without further discussion, Chairman Peed reminded the board of their next meeting, scheduled for August 13, 2025. The meeting was adjourned.